

# ROUGH RIDER

## WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

*Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.*

No. 144

NEW YORK, JANUARY 19, 1907.

Price, Five Cent

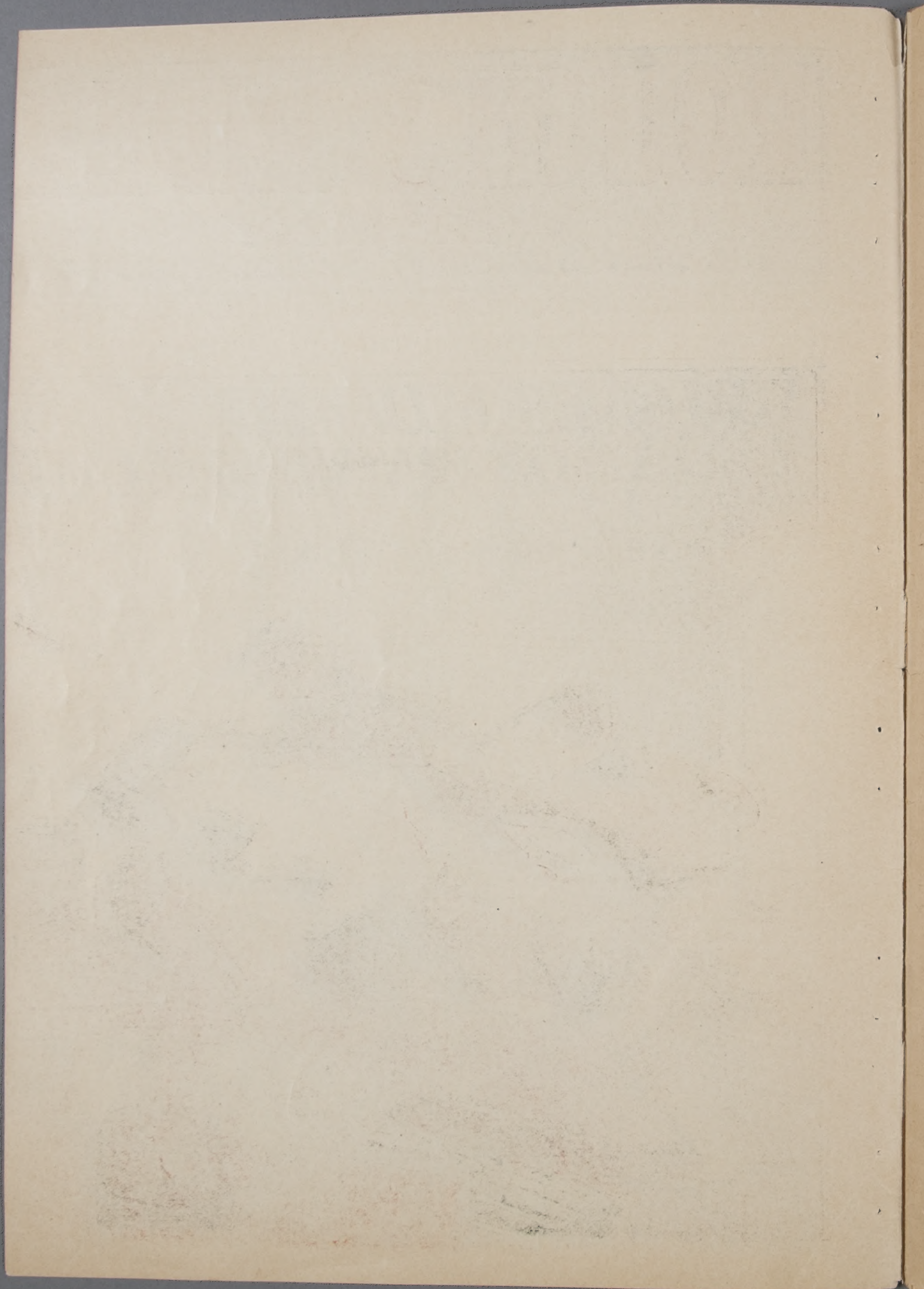
## KING OF THE WILD WEST ON VANISHING ISLAND

*OR Stella solves an Enigma*



As he fell, stunned by the blow, Captain Astley released the sea dog, which sprang at Stella's







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## King of the Wild West On Vanishing Island

OR,

### STELLA SOLVES AN ENIGMA.

By NED TAYLOR.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### SANTA YSABEL'S GHOSTLY HERDS.

"Will you be at the Moon Valley Ranch next Monday? I want to talk with you and your associates on an important business matter."

This was the substance of a telegram received by Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, one morning as he sat at the breakfast-table at the ranch. It had been brought over from Soldier Butte by a cow-puncher who had spent the night there.

The telegram was signed by John Y. Manton.

When Ted had read the telegram aloud to the boys who were all at the table, Ben Tremont drawled:

"Who the deuce is Manton?"

"Search me," replied Ted.

"Any idea what it's all about?" asked Kit Summers, who had an inquisitive mind.

"Not an idea," replied Ted easily. "But it sounds businesslike, and that is the main thing about a telegram, anyhow."

"I reckon we'll jest hev ter hold our horses until Mr. Manton arrives. I never see no sense in worryin' erbout anythin' until its past, an' then thar ain't no use worryin'. Thet's ther way I git erlong."

"Shust vy do you vorry den?" asked Carl Schwartz in a puzzled voice, whereat the boys laughed.

"It's only his way of saying that he never worries," explained Kit. "I'm afraid you are not up yet on all the subtleties of Bud's Wild Western lingo."

"By chracious, vy he don'd say so den, ain't it?"

It was Saturday, and the boys put in the day finishing up the tail ends of the week's work, and Sunday passed quickly, for in spite of their apparent indifference they were all more or less anxious to know the nature of the mysterious Mr. Manton's business, although they thought probably it was to buy some cattle, for most of their unknown visitors came to the ranch for that purpose.

Mr. Manton did not arrive until about the middle of the afternoon.

Then they saw that he was a tall, good-looking man of about thirty, bronzed by sun and wind, and carrying unmistakable evidences that he was a cowman. He was dressed, however, as a plain business man, and drove a horse which he had hired from a livery-stable in Soldier Butte.

As he drove across the valley toward the ranch-house Ted, who was engaged in breaking in a bunch of colts in the lower pasture, rode up to meet him.

"I am Jack Manton," said the man in the buggy as he reined up.



Ted greeted him hospitably and invited him to alight and enter the house.

As Mr. Manton accepted the invitation the two surveyed one another with some curiosity, and with evident approval.

Several of the boys were lounging about the living-room, having accomplished their work, or were loafing between watches, and Ted introduced their guest to them.

The stranger took a long look about the place.

"Pretty comfortable little crib you have here," he said.

"We think so," said Ted. "This is home for us, you know."

"Better than I've had for a long time," said Mr. Manton. "But I've got a real one at last not far from here in Wyoming, and that is one thing that has brought me here."

"Come to buy stock for a ranch," thought the boys, who began to lose interest in him. Cattle-buyers were common enough at the Moon Valley Ranch.

The stranger had paused, probably feeling that these stalwart young cow-punchers were not much interested in his personal or home affairs, from the uninterested expressions on their faces.

But Ted looked at him inquiringly, and he continued.

"I threw up the best ranching job in the West. I managed the largest cattle-ranch in the country, the Santa Ysabel, in California, but I quit between days, and came hiking East."

"Why?" asked Ted, after another pause, during which the boys sat up and began to look interested.

"Because I was scared out," was the astonishing reply.

Mr. Manton did not look in the least like a man who could be scared. He was certainly powerful enough physically, and he had a pair of fearless enough eyes, and a strong chin. In fact, he looked like a man who was in the habit of dominating his world.

He did not answer Ted's question immediately, but a mile stole over his firm mouth.

"Because," he said hesitatingly, "because—well, it's somewhat of a strange thing for me to get scared at anything, but things were going strangely down there."

"How was that?" asked Ted.

"My cattle were being spirited away so fast that I couldn't keep track of them."

"Rustlers, eh?"

"No, not rustlers—unless they were of the spiritual world."

One of the boys laughed his disbelief, and Manton went hastily on.

"I know it sounds kind of foolish for a grown man like me to say that, but it was the only conclusion I could come to."

"Tell us about it," said Ted.

"All right, but I'm not much on the story-telling game. The Santa Ysabel Ranch is part of an enormous California land grant of the early Spanish days. It lies partly in California and partly in Lower California, which, of course you know, is part of Mexico."

"Ought to be a good cattle country," said Ted.

"Best in the world," was the positive reply. "But for some reasons it didn't suit me. It was, as I have said, the best job I ever had or expect to have. I controlled

about fifty thousand acres of home ranch, and thousands more of free range, and when I started I had thousands of herd of cattle. There were so many of them that they had never been counted. For my work of superintending the running of the ranch, which is the property of Señora Tarrazza, I had half of the profits. Yet there were no profits, to speak of, because we lost so many cattle."

"Never find out where they went?" asked Ben Tremont.

"I tried as hard as a man could to do so, but I never did," was the reply.

"Strange," said Ted musingly.

"It does seem strange when one takes into consideration the situation of the Santa Ysabel Ranch. It was bounded on its whole Eastern side by a range of coast mountains that were absolutely impossible with cattle. On the west the Pacific Ocean is its boundary. On the north it was double fenced, and line-riders patrolled it day and night. In Mexico, its southern boundary, was a broad stream with high banks that could not be scaled by raiders and down which cattle could not be driven without destruction. This, too, was well guarded by the most trustworthy men in my employ."

"What kind of men did you have?" asked Kit.

"California greasers, Mexican and Chilian vaqueros, and a few Americans, but they were a poor sort, and I trusted my Mexicans and Chilians more, because they were more faithful to the owner of the ranch, who is the widow of a Mexican, while she herself is a Chilian."

"Pritty hard work gittin' erlong with a mixed team like thet," said Bud. "I've worked with thet kind o' a bunch myself."

"Yes, because I had hundreds of them, and they were scattered over a country as large as a couple of counties back here in God's country. But I watched them like a hawk and I never could find out that they ran off the stock. They simply couldn't do it so long without getting caught at it."

"How many cattle did you miss at a time?" asked Ted, who thought, naturally, that a dozen or more would be plenty on a ranch like Moon Valley, and perhaps a hundred would be a great number for even so large a ranch as the Santa Ysabel.

"Whole herds that I had seen myself grazing the evening before could not be found in the morning. You see we turned the cattle loose without herders, as they were not on an open range, but on a ranch with defended boundaries. Between the times when they were seen at night and the next morning when they could not be found, they would not have time to go to the eastern, northern, or southern boundary, even if they were driven on a run. And the only space for them was the Pacific Ocean."

"Level sandy shore was it?" asked Ted.

"No, high, rocky and precipitous," answered Manton.

"It is strange. But perhaps they mixed in with the other herds, for I suppose there were many herds on so large a range."

"They did not mix, for none of the other herds increased in size."

"Jest disappeared, eh?" said Bud.

"That's what's so strange about it. They couldn't have walked away, and they couldn't have been run off, they couldn't have jumped into the ocean and swum away, for they would have been dashed to death when



they jumped, and they had no wings that ever I saw. Can you blame me for feeling skittish about it?"

"Were you on good terms with your men?" asked Ted.

"The very best. They are in the main a good bunch of hombres, and they were so superstitious about it that finally they got me to feeling the same way, and so I made up my mind to quit. Just about that time an uncle of mine died in Wyoming and left me a ranch, and I resigned in a hurry. But before I went I told Señora Tarrazza that I would look out for some one to take the ranch for her."

"Does that mean us?" asked Ted.

"If you will. I believe from what I have heard of you since I have been back here that you can do it if any one can, and I have written the señora about you. I have a telegram from her to send you out, and that she will pay your expenses to the ranch, for the men will not obey the man she put over them in my place, because he is a greaser, and things are going to the deuce."

Ted looked around at the boys and saw a look of pleased expectancy on their faces.

"All right," said Ted, "I'll talk it over with my partners. I suppose you want a quick answer, and Señora Tarrazza expects swift action."

"She does," said Mr. Manton. "I'll go out and take a look at the ranch while you talk it over."

"That's not necessary," said Ted. "The decision of this crowd of fellows is not a laggard thing. Boys, do we go, or stay?"

There was no hesitancy on the part of the boys.

"Go!" they shouted in unison.

Mr. Manton's face expanded into a pleased smile.

"That lets me out, then," he said. "That's what I heard about you fellows. If you would go it would be soon, but if you said 'No,' that settled it. When will you start?"

"Things on this ranch are run so that it makes no difference whether we are here or in Patagonia," said Ted. "If things are as you say down there on the coast, the sooner we start, the better. When shall it be, fellows?"

"Right away!" was the shout, for they were all eager to be in the field again, and the prospect of running a big Spanish ranch certainly held out alluring prospects.

"You may telegraph the señora that we shall leave here for Southern California in the morning," said Ted.

"Good," exclaimed Manton. "Here is a draft on New York, which you can get cashed at any bank, for your expenses, which the señora gave me before I left. You will find her a charming woman, and if you succeed in solving the mystery of the Santa Ysabel Ranch, and in straightening matters out there, you will find it exceedingly profitable for you. Good-by, and good luck. I can now go to my own ranch and rest in peace."

"No more ghost cattle fer you, eh?" said Bud, with a laugh. "I've saw a good many cattle what looked like ghosts down on ther Pecos when thar wa'n't no grass ner water, but ther derved things didn't disappear in herds, ther wolves an' coyotes cleaned 'em up one by one. This bunch ain't got nothin' sooperstitious erbout it, exceptin' when their bellies git flat an' they hev ter keep takin' up holes in their belts, then they git a sooperstition thet it's time fer grub."

Mr. Manton drove away well pleased that he had se-

cured the boys to manage the Santa Ysabel Ranch, for it made up for his sudden desertion of Señora Tarrazza.

It did not take the King of the Wild West long to arrange matters at Moon Valley for the absence of himself and his comrades, and before night they were ready to start West.

"Say, fellers," said Bud, "s'pose we telegraph ter Stella, who's still visitin' Helen Workman in Denver, thet we're goin' West, an ask her ter meet us at Cheyenne ter say good-by. It'll be er long time before she sees her rough rider pards erg'in."

"I was just going to suggest the same thing myself," said Ted. "Who'll take the message over to Soldier Butte?"

"I will," said Bud. "I cain't trust it ter none o' these kids. They're all so excited at goin' on this yere trip ter California thet they might lose it on ther way, er fer-git ter deliver it."

In the morning the young rough riders took the stage at Soldier Butte for Belle Fourche, and before night were speeding on their way to what promised to be a pleasant task in a new country, and not one of them but saw in prospect sundry and exciting adventures in that land of romance, Southern California.

The next morning the train pulled into Cheyenne in time for breakfast, and as the boys trooped to the platform of the station they saw running toward them a pretty girl dragging by the hand a reluctant middle-aged woman.

The girl attracted a good deal of attention from the passengers, not only for her good looks, but because of her cowgirl costume of short tan skirt and riding-boots, her red bolero and rakish wide-brimmed hat, and the belt and holster that hung at her hip, from which peeped a pearl-handled .38 caliber revolver, and a row of bright cartridges.

"Hello, boys!" she cried, while yet some way off.

The boys returned her greeting with a cheer.

"We're all ready to go," cried Stella Fosdick, for it was she, as she shook hands with the boys.

"What?" said Ted.

"You bet, I'm not here for any sad farewells. Auntie wants a change, and so do I. Besides, you'll need a housekeeper away out in that strange country, and you bet you can't get anybody for the job like Auntie Graham. She's tickled to death at the prospect, ain't you, auntie?"

Mrs. Graham's languid response to Stella's enthusiastic invitation to go to work for the boys was greeted with a burst of laughter, as they all piled into the dining-room for breakfast, and so the journey to the Santa Ysabel Ranch was begun.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE RACE ON THE SANDS.

The train on which the King of the Wild West and his companions were traveling arrived in San Diego, Southern California, several days later, after an uneventful but most pleasurable journey.

Ben, Bud, and Carl made it a laughing journey all the way with their pranks and practical jokes on one another, while Ted spent a great deal of his time thinking of the task before him, the clearing up of the mystery at the Santa Ysabel Ranch.



As the train stopped in the beautiful city of the Southwest and the boys alighted they were approached by a body of men who looked as if they had just stepped out of the chorus of a Spanish comic opera.

In advance was a very picturesque individual, who came forward with his broad hat pressed to his bosom, bowing gracefully at every step, and smiling continuously through his short, black beard, showing rows of gleaming teeth.

"It ees Señor Str-rong?" he said, with a rising inflection.

"It is," said Ted, with an answering smile.

"Viva, Señor Str-rong!" said the man with the black beard.

"Viva! Viva, Señor Str-rong!" shouted the chorus behind him.

Like their leader they were swarthy, and evidently attired in their best costumes of slashed breeches, decorated down the sides with silver buttons or coins, held up by red or other brilliantly colored sashes, from which peeped knife-handles and the butts of silver-mounted revolvers. Some were short and fat, while others were tall and slim, and to Stella the whole thing was so ridiculous that she laughed.

Evidently the leader took this as an expression of approval, for he turned again and shouted:

"Viva el young ladee!"

The viva was given with a will, and Stella turned away with a laugh and a blush as the boys began to josh her.

After that the "donna," Mrs. Graham, was "vivad," and then all the rest of them.

"Say, what is this, anyhow—a viva party?" said Ben.

"This yere is ther mayor an' city council o' Vivaville givin' us ther glad hand," said Bud. "In er few minutes he'll be springin' ther keys o' ther city on us, an' offerin' us refreshments in ther shape o' hot tamales, chili con carne, and red peppers, to be washed down with boiling lye. Oh, these yere peepul is hot stuff. Whenever yer see a feller wearin' lots o' red inter his clothes yer kin make up yer mind he's warm meat from his heart out an' from his hair down."

But soon the decorated person, with another low bow and a sweet smile all around, began to speak:

"Señora, señorita, and señors," he began. "I am the segundo, me, of the Santa Ysabel Rancho. The gracious Señora Tarrazza has sent me here to welcome you and with my men to escort you to her home, where she will welcome you in person."

"Now, that's what I call the right way to treat your hired men," said Ben.

"That's the way I always do it," said Bud solemnly.

"The gracious señora, who rules our destinies, bids me to say to you that you have done her great honor in coming, and as for myself, who am only the humble segundo to the Señor Str-rong, I not only express the deepest delight at his presence, but abase myself before him. The vaqueros, who accompany me, have entrusted me with the message of their deepest welcome."

The segundo turned to the men and made a signal, and with one voice, exactly as in a comic opera, they lifted their right hands and, waving their quirts above their heads, shouted mechanically:

"Welcome!"

Evidently it had all been carefully rehearsed, and as a crowd of curious people from the train had surrounded

them, Ted was anxious to get away, especially as such remarks as "Who is it?" and "Must be some big bug coming home," could be heard.

Therefore he bowed, as they all did, and Ted said:

"I thank you for this warm welcome in the name of Señora Tarrazza, and of you all, both for myself and my friends. It shall never be forgotten."

Then the segundo bowed low again, and turned and led the way from the station, pleased and perspiring.

Behind the station they found a body of horses saddled in the Mexican style, a large carriage, very comfortably cushioned and hung on leather springs, and drawn by four small, gaily caparisoned mules, besides a heavy wagon.

"What is your name, señor?" Ted asked the segundo.

"Don Felipe Francisco Juan Flores y Cristobal," was the proud reply.

"Whew, what a mouthful," remarked Ben in an aside to Bud.

"Yes, some o' these yere greasers is all name an' shirt. Take them away an' yer ain't got much left."

"And what shall I call you?" asked Ted of the man of many names.

"Felipe, señor," was the humble reply.

"All right, Felipe. Here are the checks for our baggage. Have some of the men get it. I suppose it goes into the wagon."

"Si señor. The carriage is for the ladees, the horses for the señors. Our horses are down at the corral."

"When do we start?"

"With your permission, at once, señor. The way is long, and we shall have to travel fast to reach the ranch at nightfall."

"Very well, load up, come here with your men, and we will be on our way. I am anxious to get there as soon as possible."

The baggage was loaded into the wagon, and with the saddles and other horse-furniture, with which the boys would not travel, the wagon was soon full. It was to follow more slowly under the escort of three of the Mexicans, as there was danger of robbers along the road, Felipe informed Ted.

Stella refused to ride in the carriage, and so a horse was provided for her.

Presently there was a great clatter and a cloud of dust down the street, and up dashed Felipe and his chorus. It was a most imposing sight, as they came to a halt with their horses on their haunches, and the crowd that had gathered gave a cheer as the young rough riders sprang into their saddles, the postilions mounted the carriage mules, and with Ted, Stella, Ben, and Bud at the head, and Felipe and his men flanking the carriage, they dashed out of the city on the gallop.

"I feel as though I was part of a circus procession," said Stella.

"With the Queen of the Arena in the lead," said Ben.

"That will do for you, Ben Tremont," said Stella.

"I suppose you think you are the Strong Man."

"No, jest ther clown," said Bud quietly.

"Stung!" said Ben, good-naturedly.

"Oh, this sort of thing is common enough down here," said Ted. "All these old Spanish families come and go this way, that is, when they can afford it. So we needn't feel so proud of ourselves."



"But we might as well," said Stella. "I'm going to feel just as proud as I like."

"So, there now!" said Ben.

"You're real mean, Ben," said Stella. "I'm never going to speak to you again."

But in a minute she was chatting away with him at a lively rate.

As soon as they left the city they struck over the brown hills toward the south. It was a glorious day, with a fresh salt breeze off the Pacific Ocean, of which they caught occasional glimpses through rifts in the hills.

Occasionally the road ran through small forests of the native California trees, great oaks, and the red manzanitas, with giant ferns and other semitropical plants growing between them.

California was new to Stella, and she enjoyed the novelty to the limit, keeping up a running fire of questions to Ted and Felipe, who hovered about, dashing now and then to the rear beside his men, shouting commands excitedly about nothing at all, and calling encouragement to the small mules which were pulling the carriage along as fast as its wheels would turn.

Occasionally Ted pulled up to a walk to rest the animals, and then they clattered on again, making the farmers along the way run to see the sight, and wave a welcome and good-by with the same gesture.

At noon they stopped beside a stream that ran through a beautiful grove.

The horses were unsaddled and Felipe took from the boot of the carriage several baskets, and summoning two of the men, prepared a feast.

Almost everything that was good to eat was drawn from those baskets, coffee was brewed by Felipe himself, cloths were spread on the ground, and while the ladies and the rough riders ate from the cloths the vaqueros retired to one side and ate by themselves from the contents of one of the baskets which had been provided for them.

When the meal was finished the Mexicans stretched themselves out on their backs with cigarettes between their lips and were soon asleep. This was their siesta, and a Mexican would rather starve than keep awake through the noon hour.

But at one o'clock Felipe aroused them with the command to saddle and prepare for the start.

About the middle of the afternoon they rode out of a valley and beheld stretching before them illimitably the blue and sparkling waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Involuntarily they all stopped, and from the lips of all came expressions of wonder and delight.

"It almost makes one feel like that chap who discovered the Pacific, whatever his name was, to come upon it suddenly like this," said Ben.

Felipe rode up to them.

"We will soon be at the ranch," said he.

"Then it is not as far as I thought," said Ted.

"Ah, señor, at the ranch, I said, but not at the ranch-house," answered Felipe. "That is a long ways off yet."

The road now followed the coast-line, often along a glorious yellow beach of sand, and again on the high rocky cliffs that held back the ocean.

When they came to a long stretch of sand Stella would send her horse along with a "Yii-yip!" and the others would follow in a race that made the Mexicans' eyes bulge out at her ability to ride, for more often than

not Stella would win, not only because Ted had seen to it at the beginning that she had the best horse in the outfit, but because there were few among the boys who could beat her in the art of horsemanship.

After one of these races Felipe approached Ted.

"One of the vaqueros presents his compliments and apologies and wants to know if the señorita would run a race with him," he said. "He has a fine horse which he raised himself, and he is accounted the best rider on the ranch. He greatly admires the riding of the señorita, and would like to test which is the better."

This was said in Spanish, but Stella overheard it, and took the answer out of Ted's mouth.

"Yes," she said, "tell him I'll run him, but my horse has run in two or three races now, while his has not."

"You shall have a start in the lead, señorita," said Felipe. "That is only fair."

They were approaching a long stretch of beach, and when they reached it the young Mexican prepared for the race by taking off his embroidered jacket and heavy hat and weapons, and handing them to a companion, while Stella refused to unload anything except her hat, which she threw into the carriage with her aunt.

Ben and Bud rode off in the lead to measure off a quarter of a mile, for Stella refused to run her horse farther, although the game beast was eager to be off.

Stella was to be given a lead of twenty feet, as the Mexican thought she was entitled to no more. The distance was measured off, and the riders took their places.

Ted, with revolver in hand, was to start the race.

"Ready!" he shouted, and Stella leaned over in her saddle, her eyes ahead, speaking encouragingly to her horse, which seemed on springs. The young Mexican's eyes were blazing with excitement.

His comrades had been taunting him on the fact that here was a girl who could beat him, and he was eager to prove that he still was the champion.

Like any other Mexican, his feelings were so intense that the very thought that the girl might indeed beat him had caused to grow up in his heart something akin to hatred for her, and now his dark face had turned almost gray and his teeth were set.

"That fellow looks as if he was about to murder some one rather than to run a friendly race," remarked Ben quietly to Bud.

"Yer never kin tell erbout a greaser," remarked the old cowboy. "I see them commit murder fer less. The young feller will stand watchin', an' yer Uncle Bud is goin' ter do it."

Crack! The report of Ted's revolver stung the air suddenly, and simultaneously, it seemed, both horse sprang to the fore.

Stella gave an exultant scream, and her quirt came down on her horse's flank.

The beast sprang forward in a magnificent leap. The Mexican was yelling like a madman, lashing his horse and goading its sides at the same time with his wicked spurs.

It was plain to the boys that he was gaining. His horse was fresher, and the distance was short. He could afford to take out all there was in it of endurance, speed and pluck in that spurt.

Steadily he gained, and once Stella looked over her shoulder and saw it. But she did not use the spur again, but, leaning far over, talked to the intelligent beast as if it had been human.



They were half-way to the line now, and the Mexican had not improved what he had gained on her. But Stella soon saw that her horse was tiring under the terrible strain it had been put to, and while it was still willing enough, it was leg weary and was beginning to blow.

"Come on, boy," cried Stella in an encouraging voice. "Just a little farther."

But he was beginning to go a little heavy, and was pounding the hard sand. She knew the sound. It meant sheer weariness. She had noted a different rebound in the hoof-beats before.

Then she heard another sound, but did not look back, fearing to throw her horse from its stride. She just leaned a little farther down on its neck, talking to it as if it had been a baby trying its first steps across the floor.

The sound she had heard was the near approach of the Mexican.

Now he was abreast of her, and gaining.

Then he deliberately fouled her by riding across her. Her horse staggered from the shock, and she almost lost her seat in the saddle. But the impact had swerved his horse, and she quickly picked hers up, passed him, and, with a yell of triumph, won the race.

### CHAPTER III.

#### STRANGE LIGHTS OFF SHORE.

As she passed across the line the young Mexican, with snarl and a Spanish oath, sprang toward her with upraised hand.

"Carramba! You cheat! You try to knock me off my horse. I win the race."

He had no sooner had the words out of his mouth when Ben, who was nearest him, made a rush, and with a swinging blow, knocked him to the sand.

Bud rode up with drawn revolver. He was furious with rage, first at the accusation, and then that the greaser had lifted his hand as if to strike their girl hard.

He would have fired at the prostrate Mexican had not Stella's voice rang out:

"Stop, Bud! You would not fire at an unarmed man who is down," she cried.

"He's had enough, Bud," said Ben.

Indeed, the Mexican did seem to have all the punishment he could stand.

As he lay on his back on the sand he was gasping like a fish on the bank, the wind knocked completely out of him.

Meantime the other boys had ridden up rapidly.

"What's the matter here?" asked Ted, who had seen the blow that knocked the Mexican from his saddle.

"Oh, nothin' much," drawled Bud, "except that ther pard was goin' ter hit Stella because he didn't succeed in jockeyin' her outer ther race, an' ole Ben here handed him a hay-maker, an' if ther gal hadn't stopped me I'd punctured his tire fer him so thet he wouldn't hev rode so far in ther next race."

"We all saw that he deliberately fouled her horse in the race," said Ted.

Felipe and the other vaqueros had ridden up. The open dislike which all Mexicans have at heart for the gringo shone in their eyes.

"Felipe, I hold you responsible for this fellow," said Ted, looking at the Mexican segundo severely. "He is not straight. He tried to win the race by foul means, and then reviled the young señorita, and was about to strike her, when my friend here knocked him down. I will leave him to you for the present. He shall be dealt with in our own way later."

Felipe bowed and turned pale, and began to utter profuse apologies for his countryman, but Ted held up his hand to signify that he did not care to hear any more apologies, but wanted action.

The segundo climbed from his horse with blazing eyes, in a sudden fury.

The young Mexican was just about to rise from the ground, when Felipe reached him.

"Dog," he cried, kicking the writhing fellow until he bawled. "Dog, you would disgrace your race and the rancho by such conduct. The señora shall hear of this, and then Heaven pity you. Go to the rear, and stay there until we reach home. Dog! Dog! Dog!"

With each "dog" the segundo planted a vigorous kick upon that part of the anatomy of the vaquero intended for such punishment, and the fellow went limping off to his horse, whimpering like a bad boy who has just received the deserved parental rod.

Then the way was taken up again toward the ranch-house without further comment.

Twilight was just falling over the beautiful land as they rode along the cliffs toward the big stone ranch-house, which had withstood the storms and the sunshine for nearly two-thirds of a century.

"But look, señor," said Felipe, riding alongside Ted in the best of humor, for within the past half-hour, while the ranch-house was in sight, all, except the vaquero who had been punished, acted as though nothing had occurred to mar the peace of the trip.

Ted looked where the segundo indicated and saw a low, picturesque house with a broad veranda, peeping from beneath a grove of trees.

"Well, Felipe?" he said.

"It is the house of the manager of the ranch," said the segundo. "It is large and fine and cool on the hottest days."

The boys all looked with interest at their future home, and Stella and Mrs. Graham were quite delighted to preside in such apparently pleasant quarters.

But a short way ahead was the big house about which clustered numerous other and smaller houses, the barracks of the vaqueros and the abodes of the house servants.

Around three sides of the house were broad verandas, and they were now approaching that which faced the ocean.

On it stood the figure of a woman, and as they rode up they saw that she was beautiful in spite of her great age, and that her head was crowned with a wealth of snow-white hair.

Beside her stood a beautiful young girl, and behind her a horde of curious servants.

As the boys rode up they uncovered, and dismounted, and Ted led the way, with Stella and Mrs. Graham, up the broad stairs, and introduced himself, then Mrs. Graham and Stella.

"I welcome you all as friends come to my aid," said the old lady in pure, soft Spanish, "and I want you to feel that you are as much at home here as you would



be in homes of your own. Everything is yours to command. I have arranged the other house for your comfort. But you are tired with your journey, and you shall come and see me to-morrow. Felipe, I hope you carried out my orders well to see to it that my friends were well cared for during their trip."

Felipe bowed low, and did not speak.

"Where is Antonio?" she asked, running her eyes over the group of vaqueros, who were sitting on their horses a short distance away.

The young Mexican who had raced with Stella had disappeared.

In a low voice Felipe related the events of the race, and its culmination.

The brows of Señora Terrazza darkened with anger as the tale proceeded.

"Have him brought here at once," she commanded in a stern voice.

Instantly half a dozen men hurried away, and at the end of a few minutes returned, leading the pale and trembling Antonio.

The señora regarded him with a scowling face.

"So this is the way you treat my honored guests, is it?" she thundered. "What have you to say?"

Evidently Antonio had nothing to say, for he only hung his head and trembled.

"What shall I do with him?" she asked, turning to the boys.

There could be no doubt but Señora Terrazza was mistress of her own domain, and in the habit of administering justice and punishment in her own way, and with an iron hand when necessary.

The boys did not offer any suggestions as to the punishment of the young Mexican, and she turned to him again.

"Antonio, you were born on this ranch, and I have treated you like a son, and now you have disgraced my hospitality forever. You shall go to the prison for twenty days and live on beans and water, and you shall receive fifty lashes on the back from the segundo. Then you shall leave home forever!"

"Mercy!" cried Antonio, dropping to one knee.

"Do not punish him so severely," said Stella, stepping forward. "He only did so in the heat of passion, and I am sure regretted it the next moment. He has been punished enough. Pardon him this time."

Antonio turned grateful eyes toward Stella.

"Since a guest requests it," said the old lady, "it must be so in this house. But another time, Antonio, you may not have so tender-hearted a one to plead for you. It should be a lesson to you to curb your anger. Go!"

With a few more polite words of welcome, and thanks from Ted, the "guests," as the señora seemed to regard her new employees, departed for their own house under the escort of Felipe.

They found the house all that they could wish for. It was commodious, and furnished in the best Spanish style. There were servants in the halls and kitchen, who were even then preparing baths for the travelers, while from the kitchens came the odors of cooking.

The boys elected, however, to take a plunge in the ocean, which at that point was less than half a mile from the house, and, without unsaddling their horses, rode with a cheer to the cliff.

Here they found stairs cut down the sheer wall of the

cliff to a short sandy beach, and in a short time were reveling in the cool and refreshing water.

They returned to a supper excellently cooked and served, and spent the time they were at the table congratulating themselves on their good fortune, and praising the kindness of the donna of the ranch.

It was dark when they rose from the table, and they went out on the broad veranda to enjoy the night air and the sparkle of the stars in the black sky, and listen to the music of the violins and guitars from the houses about the big residence.

But Ted, facing this new responsibility, wanted to get away by himself for a while and think it all over.

The events of the day and their reception by Señora Terrazza had been cause enough for astonishment. He had noted her look of surprise at his youth, and he caught an expression of disappointment in it.

No doubt she felt that he was too young to accomplish what a man like Manton had failed to do. Well, he would have to show her that she was mistaken, and that signally.

These were his thoughts as he walked along the cliff to the north.

Below him the ocean was as a mirror. There was no wind, and the sea was tranquil, save for the soft splash of water against the base of the cliff.

He had walked far along the cliff when before him he saw the dark form of a man standing on the edge of the rock that overhung the water.

He thought it must be one of the herders belonging to the ranch, and he desired to speak to some one who knew the whereabouts of the herds in the vicinity.

"Come la va, señor," he called.

As instantly as the blowing out of a candle, and as silently, the man disappeared.

Ted ran to where the man had been standing but a moment before, but the place was vacant. The man had disappeared as if by magic.

But Ted could not disbelieve his senses. He had seen a man there, and there was no doubt of it. The rock was solid, the sea was far down, but Ted, lying down and reaching far over, could see the shining sand below and there was no dark form lying there.

Ted was not easily frightened, and scoffed at ghosts but he shivered slightly as he went on.

A few hundred yards farther on he came upon a herd of cattle lying down, and they began to straggle to their feet at his approach. Why had they not done so for the other man? Perhaps after all he had been the victim of an optical illusion.

He turned to go back, when suddenly he heard sound far out on the water. It was a heavy wash.

"A big fish out there," he said to himself. Then he thought that big fishes make a splashing noise.

Then he distinctly heard the thud of machinery, but strain his eyes as he would into the darkness he could see nothing.

He listened intently. There could be no doubt that somewhere out there an engine was throbbing, but faintly.

As he bent his ear toward the ocean the sound became more audible. The rhythmic beat of an engine came to him.

What if a steamship, having lost its reckoning, was coming ashore?



But there were no lights to be seen, and he put that idea from him as being impossible.

He was getting a taste of the same magic, or trickery, perhaps, that had driven Manton away from the ranch, and had caused the natives to shun the cliff at night.

There came to his ear the faint, far away-jangle of a bell.

Unmistakably it was the bell in the engine-room of a steamship of some description. He had heard those bells often enough, and under enough different circumstances not to mistake them.

Following the jangle the faint thud of the engines he had heard stopped, and the wash of water grew less.

"There is a ship out there," he muttered to himself, "but it's mighty funny I can't see the bulk of her against the sky. Maybe, after all, it is the ghost of a ship, as these people believe."

He smiled at himself for the thought.

It was as silent as the grave now out on the water, and Ted sat down on the cliff to watch and listen.

He was not a bit frightened, for he knew that he was as invisible on the dark shore as any one, if there was any one, was on the water.

If there was a trick in this he was determined to ferret it out.

To his astonishment he soon saw a faint green light appear above the surface of the ocean. It seemed to hover for a moment, then it disappeared.

"Here's something new," he said. "Wonder what part of the ghost that is."

In a few moments, near the same spot, a hazy red gleam shone through the night.

"Quite a celebration," thought Ted. "Sort of a Fourth of July doings."

Two lights, brilliant and piercing, one red, the other green, shone across the water. These were real, he knew, as he could see the long points of color shine across the water waveringly. There was nothing ghostly about them.

Slowly they began to sink, and at the same time the thud of the engines was taken up.

Again that mysterious wash of water against the base of the cliff.

But yet he could see nothing of the hull of a ship, as he must have done if she had been there.

Suddenly the lights disappeared, the thud of the engines ceased with the wash of the water, and the night was as still as if all the world was dead.

What did it mean?

Whatever it was, here was the mystery for him to solve.

For a long time he remained at his station, but nothing having occurred, he walked back to the house and went to bed, where the other boys had long since retired.

As he stepped out on the veranda in the morning he was met by Felipe, white-faced and trembling.

"Señor," he whispered, "another herd disappeared in the night."

## CHAPTER IV.

### BUD HEARS GHOSTLY MUSIC.

"What seems ter be ailin', Bunkio?" said Bud at the breakfast-table, noticing Ted's worried look.

"It has begun," said Ted.

"What has? Life erlong ther Pacif'? If so I'm glad I come," said Bud, with a joyful grin.

"Last night another herd was lifted."

"Jumpin' sand-hills, yer don't say so! Well, ding fiddle my cats, if they ain't gittin' started on us right soon. Won't even give us time ter change our shirts before they begin pesterin' us."

"I'm afraid it is as Manton said, although I laughed at his fears when he was at Moon Valley."

"How's that, ole pal? Don't yer git ter bein' spooky, er I'll be growin' some wings myself an' flyin'. I ain't never cared ter 'sociate with things I cain't see ner feel."

"Well, I heard something last night, and saw some strange lights and felt puzzled, and yet I can't tell you what it was."

"Ted, yer liver is plumb outer order, er yer never wouldn't talk like that. Yer head's too clear fer them sort o'—what d'yer call 'em—hallo—somethin' er other."

"Hallucinations, perhaps, you mean."

"Ther same. But weepin' willers, what does ther dictionary fellers want ter give sich a long, highfalutin' name ter jist ornery biliousness fer?"

"No, Bud, it was not an hallucination. I was walking along the cliff last night after supper when I saw a man ahead of me moving slowly along the edge of the rock. I hailed him and he immediately disappeared, and—"

"Ted, I'd recommend a mejum dose o' quinine an' a sweat after, that's what brought me to ther time I had it down on the Pecos in ther spring o'—"

"Chop it!" exclaimed Ben.

"I'll chop you, if ye break inter this yere story, ye overgrown dude. I'm a-tellin' o' this yere story ter Ted fer ther benefit o' his liver. Now you hush."

"Don't mind him, Bud," said Stella. "He's only doing it to be smart."

"No, I'm not," said Ben. "But I think Ted's story is more important even than Bud's pleasing fictions."

"What about that time down on the Pecos, Bud? My story will keep," said Ted.

"Well, 'twas this away. I was punchin' cows one winter on Bill Berry's X Bar X Ranch, an' after ther spring round-up we all goes inter ther home place."

"To rest up, I suppose," suggested Ben.

"That's c'rect, son. I reckon big, an' brave, an' grand, an' handsome as you is, as I heard thet tow-headed dinin'-room gal at Rawlins, ther one with ther frizzled ha'r like a sick calf lookin' through a bunch o' wild grass, call yer—"

A roar of laughter went up at this exposure of the dining-room girl's expression of admiration of Ben, which none of them had heard before.

"She did no such thing," said Ben hotly, as a blush covered his brozed face, and crept up to the roots of his hair.

"That's all right, dear. P'r'aps yer thought I wuz asleep, an' didn't hear yer. But, as I wuz sayin', even you would hev been some tired if yer hadn't more'n three days' sleep fer five months stiddy. Anyhow, Bill Berry, who was a humane man in some respects, even if he did take a shot at every Injun and greaser he see ez a matter o' principle an' in ther cause o' freedom, told us ter go up ter ther house an' kill a two-year-old steer an' fill our pale American skins full o' beef, an' sleep our dwindlin' heads off."

"He was kind," said Stella sympathetically.

"He was—after he'd near killed us all. Well, we hiked



before he'd time ter take it back. I wuz so dead fer sleep thet I fell off my hoss twice before I got ter ther house, jest from goin' ter sleep in ther saddle an' dreamin' I wuz goin' ter sleep on watch."

"Well, where does the quinine come in?" interrupted Ben.

"I'd hate ter tell yer. But ez I wuz sayin', before bein' interrupted by my perlite pin-head friend, we got ter ther house all right. Thar wuz 'Shorty' Butt. an'—but I must tell yer erbout 'Shorty.' He wuz a Eastern dude likewise."

Bud threw a meaning glance at Ben, who pretended indifference, while all the rest grinned.

"His real an' legal-tender name wuz Walsingham Wellington Butt, an' ter hear him tell it wuz jest like listenin' ter a feller fallin' down-stairs. He starts fine, down he goes, Wals-ing-ham-well-ing-ton, gittin' faster all ther time; then he gits ter ther bottom with a bump. I wuz always joshin' 'Shorty' erbout his jay cognomen, an' he didn't jest seem ter like it altogether, an' says as how some day he'll git plenty square with me. He did."

"How was that?" asked Kit.

"Well, ter go on back, we got ter ther house an' some o' ther boys cut out a likely young beef and dressed it out, an' we e't sirloin until our eyes popped out—we hadn't been havin' nothing but sow bosom an' saleratus biscuit fer so long thet we wuz all gittin' yaller an' greasy, an' so we e't an' e't until we begin ter mill in a herd an' beller, then we all bedded down an' slep'. All but Shorty."

"What did he do?" asked Stella breathlessly.

"Ye shall hear. I went ter sleep, an' yer couldn't hev waked me with a slap stick applied vigorously, until ther beef wore off. Then I come out o' my trance. I reckon it wuz erlong about three o' ther mornin'. We wuz in ther bunk-house, an' I rolled over an' took a look at ther sky through ther winder an' got my time from ther stars. I stretched an' wuz jest goin' ter roll over fer another snooze when all o' a sudden thar come ter my ears a faint an' melojus sound."

"What was it like?" asked Stella, who was leaning on the table with her elbows and her chin in her hands, taking in Bud's story with such intense interest that the boys winked at one another and smiled.

"Well, I reckon ye've all heerd the band playin' away off, an' when ther wind shifted ye could hear it jest a little plainer, but ye couldn't quite make out ther toon, sort er aggrevatin'-like, but pleasant."

They all had had the experience, and nodded.

"'Twas like thet. Oncet in a while ye'd hear ther boom-boom of the drum and then it would die away, an' a sort er sweet, tinklin', musical sound'd come.

"I shore knowed thar couldn't be no band playin' erway out thar on ther Pecos at three o'clock in ther mornin', an' I wondered if I was gettin' daffy from goin' so long without sleep.

"I worried erlong fer a hour er more tryin' ter fergit it an' go ter sleep, but, no, sir, not a wink fer me.

"Fin'ly I got desp'rit, an' I reaches over an' gives Shorty, who's in ther next bunk ter me, a poke in ther short ribs an' wakes him up.

"'Shorty,' says I, 'do yer hear ther band playin'?' says I.

"'What's ther matter with yer?' says he. 'Air yer

goin' dippy? Thar ain't no band out here. Ye've been dreamin'."

"Jest then ther thing begin ag'in. 'Thar, don't yer hear it now? Plain ez day. Thar's ther drum, an' thar's ther toon. Tum-ti-tum-too-tootle-toot. Don't yer hear it, Shorty?'

"'Pore feller,' says Shorty, rollin' over an' snorin' erway. Well, that settled it. I didn't sleep no more thet night, but jest lay thar until daylight, listenin' ter ther ghost band, then I fell inter a sort o' a doze an' Shorty woke me up, sayin' breakfast wuz ready.

"When I come down Miss Berry tells me I'm lookin' some peaked, an' ther boys all sympathizes with me, particular Shorty. That night I wakes up ag'in, and ther ghost band is playin' at ther old stand jest ther same, an' no more sleep fer me. So it goes fer several nights, an' I'm gittin' worn out. I couldn't eat my vittles, an' I moped eround all day gittin' peakeder an' peakeder, an' Miss Berry, ez kind-hearted a woman ez ever lived, says it's gittin' ser'ous, an' gives me a big dose o' quinine, an' puts me ter bed, covered with blankets, an' I sweat like a jockey makin' weight. That night I slep' all right, an' didn't hear no band, an' not any more after thet. In a couple o' days I wuz all right ag'in, an' spry ez a sand-flea."

"Did you ever find out what the band was?" asked Stella, as Bud apparently finished the story and leaned back in his chair.

"I did," he answered.

"I don't see any point to that story," said Ben disdainfully.

"Well," said Bud, "when I wuz leavin' the X Bar X Ranch ter come north, Shorty comes ter me an' says 'Bud, I want ter make a confession ter yer, so's I kin free my conscience in case I sh'd git bucked off an' my neck broke.' I wuzn't feelin' any too good t'ward Shorty nohow, an' I says, 'Which I hopes may happen.

"'Well, whether it do er not,' says he, 'yer might e well know. D'ye remember ther band yer ust ter hear o nights at ther ranch-house?'

"I looks at him suspicious, an' I gets cold feet. 'do,' says I. He gits ready ter run. 'It wuz me,' say he. 'I caught a rat with a button onto his tail, an' ever night I put him in Miss Berry's wash boiler with the lid on, an' ther sweet music what yer heard wuz ther ra climbin' up an' fallin' back erg'in, tryin' ter git out, an' ther button on his tail made ther tum-ti-tum-tootle-toot what yer enj'yed. Now, I reckon we're square.' He cu an' run, an' I ain't n'ever see him since."

"I fail to see the moral of the tale," sneered Ben.

"I reckon it's a heap like ther button on ther rat tail," responded Bud. "Ther ghost band what I hear may turn out jest ez ser'ous ez ther things Ted heer an' saw last night. Since thet time I ain't never bee afraid o' spooks, an' when I say I am, I'm only talkin fer ther benefit o' children like you."

Ted told them all that he had heard and seen th night before.

"Now," said he, "it is my belief that the sounds heard are the mystery we must solve, for they are cause by the thing, whatever it is, that is carrying off the cattle we are here to protect. That done, our work is over. But I am convinced of one thing, and that is the catt are not taken away without help from people on th ranch. Who they are must be discovered."



"What do you think made the sounds you heard last night?" asked Kit.

"Nothing else than a ship, but what kind of a ship I cannot imagine, or how she manages to get the cattle aboard."

"But I don't see how we are going about it," said Ben.

"Neither do I, but it will come to us if we keep our eyes peeled, which we must all do. It will be the duty of every one to watch every man on this ranch from now on, and in the evenings we can report and talk things over together and arrive at conclusions that may solve the mystery before we know it."

This was agreed on.

"The first thing is to go and see Señora Tarrazza, and have a consultation and get her orders and wishes," said Ted.

"I know what she'll say," said Stella. "She'll say for you to go ahead and do what you think best."

"I hope she does. I'd like to be wholly unhampered in this matter, for I fear that the ranch people will only try to block us."

They all went over to the big stone house, and were deceived by the donna on the north veranda.

Ted reported what he had seen the night before, and as he talked the good woman crossed herself several times, which made plain to him that she was filled with the same superstitions as the vaqueros and peons on the place.

"What are your orders?" asked Ted, as he rose to take his leave.

"Solve the mystery of the disappearance of the herds all I can ask, señor," said she. "No one has ever been able to do it, and I pray you may do so." She said this, however, with a shade of doubt in her voice that stirred the pride of the King of the Wild West, and made him determine to do it at whatever cost, but he made no promises, and bowed himself out.

He had Felipe line up the vaqueros for inspection, and as he rode past them he noted their faces well and memorized their names, picking out those whom he deemed unworthy of trust.

He then separated them into squads, at the head of which he placed one of the young rough riders, and gave each a certain section of the ranch to watch, while he kept general direction over them all.

To Bud and Carl he gave the coast section, as he considered that the critical point, while he sent Kit to oversee the herds in the southern part of the range, where there were three large bunches ranging up and down. Ben went to the east along the mountain country to make a census of the herds roaming there. Clay Whipple went to the north, and the other boys to the intermediate points.

Each was to learn the number of herds, and count the cattle in each, giving every herd a characteristic name, so that it could be known and watched for increase or loss, and thus a complete census of the wealth of the ranch established.

The methodical and business way in which he went about his work astonished the vaqueros, who recognized him at once the best sort of a cowman, and the bulk of them jumped when he gave an order.

Every night the boys came into their house and around the table reported what they had done, and Ted wrote all down in a journal kept for the purpose.

Of course it would have been impossible to have accomplished all that he did without the splendid organization of the young rough riders, who had learned the cow business with him.

Within a few days he was able to go to Señora Tarrazza with a complete report of the number of cattle she owned. This he vouched for, as he had ridden day and night himself, and verified as far as possible the reports of the boys, which he found in the main correct.

To say that the donna of the ranch was surprised is to put it mildly. She looked at Ted in wonder as he laid the facts he had gathered before her in a business-like way.

"I had no idea, señor, that we had so many cattle on the ranch," she said. "We are richer than we thought. Felipe has always told me that we had only half as many."

"Felipe doubtless thought he was right," said Ted. "But he had not the assistance at getting at the facts that we have had. There was no way for him to make an actual count. Now we shall know how many of the cattle are missed, and, I hope, where they go to."

Even while Ted was defending the smiling and bowing Felipe he wondered why he had lied to his mistress, and resolved to watch him closely. He was already beginning to doubt the sincerity of the smooth Mexican, who had evidently succeeded in fooling Manton.

Every night Ted had watched at the cliff where he had seen the lights off shore, even sleeping there nights when there was no sea-fog, but he heard and saw nothing alarming.

The night the census of the cattle was completed he looked around at the eager faces of his comrades, and said:

"Now we shall soon know how many herds disappear, and where they go to."

## CHAPTER V.

### CARL AND THE MERMAID.

"I've been battin' my foolish head fer three days now, an' I swan I can't make out how any man, human or otherwise, could git erway from this yere place with a bunch o' cattle like this," said Bud Morgan, stopping his horse at the point on the cliff where Felipe had said the various herds of stolen cattle had disappeared.

He and Carl were coming from a general inspection of the part of the ranch over which Ted had given them jurisdiction.

Grazing not far from them on the grassy plain that ran back from the ocean until it was stopped by the range of mountains in the east was a herd of about eight hundred cattle, most of them two and three-year-olds, under a fine black bull with a white face, which Ted had named "Domino," on account of the fancied resemblance of the white patch on his face to a mask. It was known as the Domino herd, and was as fine a bunch of cattle as there was on the ranch, although not as large as some of the others.

The question had been troubling Carl also, who had wondered, in his simple Teutonic way, why a man should be so foolish as to steal anything when he might save up his money and buy it, if he wanted it badly enough.

"Yah, I, too, haf dinking been," he answered thoughtfully.



"Well, did any thoughts come, -- wuz it jest dinky?" asked Bud.

"I guess dose 'doughts oof mine already as goot as dose mit yours, und if der troot vas known my doughts as dinky as yours haf been."

Carl said this with wonderful dignity, drawing himself up in an oratorical pose.

"Thet's all right, Carl, I reckon they be. Maybe they was dinkier."

"Shuer! How can a feller dink doughts vot ain't dinky? Dot's vot I vant to know."

"Search me."

"Now, I dink dot oof all der poys, und I lofe und atmire dem all, dair ain't von dot vas dinkier as I vas."

"C'rect, Carl, ole sport. You certainly air a dinky German."

"Vot you mean already? To insoolt me, vat?" He had just realized that Bud had been leading him on to play upon his German way of saying "think" until it had been twisted into dinky.

"I didn't say nothin' that you didn't say yourself. Now, honest, did I?"

"Vell, come to consideration it," said Carl, with slow dignity, "you didn't eggsaghtly, aber you let myself make me ridiculousness."

"Well, forget it," said Bud, with a good-natured laugh, "tell me, what is your idea of how any one could steal a bunch of cattle from here."

"I haf severial doughts on dos matters. Fairstly, dey air-ships might haf hat. But dose is, perhaps, not looks so easy as it is, und ve vill dot dismiss mitout debationing. But dit you efer dink dot der gattle-tiefs might use dose cork belts der same as on dose steamships are? I haf seen dose mineselluf, ven I camed der olt country from."

"Thet thar's an idea fer yer," roared Bud, slapping his leg with his gauntleted hand. "I shore never would 've thought o' thet. But how would they go about it? Thet's what gets me."

"Dey haf der big life-belts on der gattle mit cork on deir insides——"

"Inside ther cattle?"

"No; but, you vas schafskopf der-day. Inside der belts der cork vor."

"Oh, I understand now," said Bud, nodding gravely. "An' then?"

"Vell, two mens fastens der belt aroundt der mittle oof der gattle, und shoves him der cliff hinter."

"Great idee. What happens then?"

"Vell, der kuh mit der belt on, ven she der vasser strikes dinks she no more at der ranch is vanted, und strikes ouid und svims."

"Yes?"

"Und outside der otcean is boats vat dem picks oop, und away dakes dem."

"Say, Carl, you've a great head. Did yer ever hev it examined?"

"Vat is dose?"

"Looked inter, yer know, ter see vat might be in it."

"Say, loog here, But. You vas friend for me, put py colly I wouldn't dake dot from my vorst enemy. I nefer had von of dose dings in my het since I vor a *knabe* at *schule*."

"What things?"

"Vot you say I ought my het to haf eggssamined vor."

"I don't understand what yer drivin' at, Carl. I shore don't."

"Yes, you do. Dose little dings vot mages you scr-ratch."

Bud understood now, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"You take the cake. You're ther whole cheese, Carl. You're the worst!"

"Dere you go again. I suppose you dink pecause I in Chermany born vor, dot you can call me Limburger und Bratwurst und oder kinds of cheese und sausage. Ve ain'd friends no more. I hate mit you."

"All right, if yer wants ter take it that way I can't help it. Farewell, fickle one. I'm goin' ter ride eround on ther other side of der herd an' stay there, so we won't quarrel no more."

"Dere you go vonce more, calling me a pickle. I von't stand it, py colly."

But Bud had gone away laughing, and Carl sat for a long time on his horse with his head sunk in contemplation of the pitfalls of the English language, and wondering why people were so foolish as to not all to speak the language of "dose dear Chermany," which was so much easier to speak than any other.

Still, after all, he thought, Bud was a good fellow, and as they always had been good friends, he would not hold it against him because he could not understand what he said.

As he was looking out to sea he suddenly started forward, rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

"I guess I'm seeing things," he said to himself, and turned away to look at the herd.

Bud was riding slowly up and down the line of cattle studying them carefully.

Then Carl looked beyond at the brown hills and the purple mountains.

Everything seemed all right in that direction.

So he turned deliberately and looked out on the water again.

"*Mein Gott!*" he exclaimed.

A hundred feet from the shore he saw the head and shoulders of a girl above the tranquil surface of the water. Her hair shone like gold in the sun, and she was waving one white arm, beckoning him toward her.

"I am dreaming," muttered Carl, as he walked his horse slowly toward the edge of the cliff.

As he got closer he saw that the maiden in the water was very real.

He could see now that she had brown eyes, and that she was very pretty.

"Am I bewitched?" said Carl aloud.

Then he remembered that this was the very place where Ted had seen the strange lights, and heard the noises of the phantom ship, and where the man had disappeared before his eyes.

He began to tremble at the thought, but seemed to be drawn irresistibly onward.

But with true German thrift he determined that if he was to perish there was no use wasting a good horse, so he dismounted and went forward on foot.

When he got to the edge of the cliff he halted. He would not go any farther until he had to.

"I vonder vot it iss," he said aloud. "Iss it a young lady in swimmin', oder iss it vun oof dem mairmaits, vat you about read in der story-books?"

The mermaid, if it was one, laughed coquettishly



him, and once more beckoned him to come to her, but Carl shook his head.

"I can't do it," he yelled to her.

Beckoning again, she called "Why?"

"Py colly, dot's funny," he thought. "She must be in American mairmait. She can English speaking."

"I can't swim," he shouted back to her earnestly.

She threw out both her arms toward him in an imploring gesture that was well-nigh irresistible.

It was all Carl could do to keep from jumping into the water and trying it anyway. It was not far to where he seemed to be floating on the water, and perhaps he could wade half the distance and flounder the rest of the way.

"She must like me very mooch," he said to himself, pulling down his jacket and smoothing his hair at his temples.

Suddenly she began to sing in a singularly sweet and plaintive voice, unlike anything Carl had ever heard before.

He stood spellbound as the song went on.

Could it be that she was human?

He did not believe it, more especially as he had found it so hard to resist her blandishments.

As she sang, Carl repeated to himself her words, but all that he could remember were these:

"A maid of the sea am I,  
A child of the wind and foam,  
I was born of a zephyr's sigh,  
And destined fore'er to roam.

"Happier far than maids earth-born,  
I'm free as the winds that sweep,  
Riding the bosom of the storm,  
Or resting in ocean's deep."

As the song floated across the water to him Carl flung out his arms toward her, then pressing his hands to the region of his heart he rolled his eyes heavenward with an agonized and imploring expression that said, "Come, come, beautiful 'maid of the sea'."

The song ceased, and again the mermaid beckoned to him, and his romantic German nature prompted him to go to her. It would have taken but little more encouragement from her to have made him leap into the sea.

"Hold on there, yer crazy loon, what air ye doin'?"

He heard Bud's excited voice, and felt himself grasped by a pair of powerful arms and drawn back from the edge of the cliff.

"Led me go to her, der peautiful maiden," he cried in agonized tones.

"Crazy ez a coot," said Bud, who did not release his hold.

"I come, I come! Sweet maiden, wait fer me," cried Carl.

"You shet up an' stop yer wrastlin', er I'll give yer a hit on ther jaw," shouted Bud.

"Let me loose go," shouted Carl. "Der peautiful young mairmait vot sings to me, she calls me to her und want ter go."

"Hold yer hosses here, Dutchy," cried Bud. "I be- lieve ther chump wants ter commit susanside."

But Carl was growing desperate, and as he was very long Bud had some difficulty in holding him.

At last Carl managed to struggle as far as the edge of the cliff and get a glimpse of the water.

"She is not there no more alretty. You haf drowdet er," he cried.

Then he twisted himself around and grasped Bud in a fury of despairing anger, and they began to wrestle.

Bud was trying to drag Carl away from the edge of the cliff, and Carl didn't know what he wanted to do, except he thought that the beautiful girl had sunk and he had not been able to save her, owing to the stupidity of Bud, who simply would not understand.

Bud was glad when he heard the hoof-beats of horses, and, looking over his shoulder, saw Ted and Stella approaching at a gallop.

From afar Ted had seen Carl's antics at the cliff's edge, and after spending a moment, wondering what the matter could be, rushed to the scene.

When he was close enough he leaped from the saddle and grasped Carl.

"Here, what's all this about?" he asked sternly.

Carl immediately released his hold on Bud, and, turning to Ted, wailed:

"Oh, Ted, he wouldn't let me go to safe der peautiful young mairmait."

"He's plum loco," was Bud's panting comment.

"I am not," said Carl vehemently. "Oh, can't you understood nodings. I dell you tree, four time dot der young lady downding iss, und look, dere she iss not." He waved an eloquent arm seaward.

"Cool off, Carl, and tell me quietly what it is all about," said Ted in a soothing voice.

"Vell, dis der vay it iss," began Carl quietly enough.

"Here vas I standing und looking out mit der sea on. Und out dere in der vater vas a peautiful young mairmait mit long golden dresses hanging mit her head on. Und she called to me mit her arm, so. Und I sait, 'No, I swim cannot do.' Und she make some more motionings, den she to sing began. 'I am a mait of der sea, of der vind und foam a chilt,' und a lot more of peautiful moosic. Den vas I crazy mit lofe fer her, und I vas going to swim out ven But grapped me, und ven I myself loose tore she vas gone der vater under."

During this recital of his woes Bud was tapping his head suggestively, while it was all Ted could do to repress a smile.

"Carl, are you sure you didn't dream it?" asked Ted.

"Shuer not. Vy should I? At fairst I tought I vas bevitched, but she vas dere, all right. Yes, sir. I am not foolishing, Ted. She had long, yellow hair und her eyes were brown."

"Then she was not a bit of floating seaweed?"

"Say, Ted, you making me tired. Can seaweed sing, ask me?"

"No, Carl, I can't say that I ever heard seaweed sing."

"I tell you I ain't cr-r-azy, I seed it mineselluf."

"Wait a minute," said Stella quietly. "Isn't it possible that what Carl has been saying is true? Isn't this the spot where you saw the disappearing man? Nobody called you crazy. In my belief it is part of the mystery."

"Stella, you are right," said Ted decisively. "And it only serves to deepen that mystery."

## CHAPTER VI.

### TED OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION.

By the time supper was ended at the house and the boys were ready to discuss with Ted the doings of the



day, Carl was quite tranquil, and had been thinking over his interview with the "mermaid."

He was somewhat ashamed of himself for taking the matter so seriously as to acknowledge that he was in love with the "beautiful young mairmaid." But at that, she *was* beautiful, and she could sing mighty well for a person who lived all the time in the water.

Neither Ted nor Bud had mentioned the incident to him again, believing that a correct account of the affair could be got if they did not seek to cast ridicule on it.

No doubt something remarkable had happened that pointed toward the solution of the mystery, if they were patient enough.

"Boys," said Ted, "Carl had an adventure this afternoon at the cliff, where I saw the man disappear, that puts what I saw and heard in the shade. Now, this is a serious matter to us all, and I hope you will refrain from joshing Carl while he is telling what he saw and heard. Go on, Carl."

With this friendly encouragement, Carl looked around the board, and, seeing nothing but serious and interested faces, began to tell how he had seen the girl in the water. For the first time it struck him as peculiar that the girl had remained in the same place during the whole incident, and had then quietly disappeared.

There was no doubt in his mind now that she was human, and if so, who was she, where had she come from, and how did she manage to disappear so thoroughly?

As he told the story, describing what he had seen, but leaving out his own emotions at the sight, he put these questions.

He recited the words of the girl's song, which in the meantime he had had time to think over.

"Boys," said Ted, when Carl had finished answering innumerable questions which his strange tale had called up, "I believe I have it. The lights which I saw, and the sound of the machinery came from a submarine boat."

"By Jove, I believe you are right," said Ben Tremont.

"But that doesn't solve the mystery of the stolen cattle," said practical Kit quietly.

"No, it doesn't," said Ted. "No submarine that I ever saw or heard of could carry away a whole herd of cattle."

"If it's a submarine boat, what is she doing around here so long?" said Stella. "The disappearing man evidently came from her, as well as the beautiful mermaid, whom, I believe, is just as human as I am."

"More so," said Ben gallantly, "for you are half-divine."

He had just time to dodge a crust of bread that Stella laughingly threw at his head.

"Well," said Ted, almost despairing, "if it's a submarine we are practically helpless while they are in the water, for we have no submarines, but if they come on land we may be able to catch some of them, and that will go a long way toward clearing the matter up. But, a word of caution, we must not let any one on the ranch know what we have discovered so far. It might ruin everything."

It was scarce daylight when Ted awoke with a strange feeling that something was going on that needed his attention.

He often had this feeling, which was no more than

intuition, which some people who do not understand its wonderful possibilities slangily call a "hunch."

Without waking any of the boys he rose and slipped into his clothes and out of the house.

It was still dark, and he quietly made his way along the cliff toward the bewitched spot, as they had got in the habit of calling it, where the strange events of the past few days had taken place.

As he approached it quietly he heard a faint creaking noise.

Slowly he crept along the cliff, occasionally raising his head to look over the water.

But it was too dark to see anything yet, although he could still hear faint and, as it seemed, cautious noises.

It reminded him of the night he had heard the thud of the engine and had seen the lights, but the noises he heard now were not at all similar to those of the previous occasion.

Farther and farther he crept toward the spot, careful to make no noise that might betray him.

Suddenly he heard a voice so near, apparently, that it made him shrink close to the rock over which he was crawling.

"How many boxes did she leave?" The voice was that of a cultivated man.

"Sixteen."

"Pretty good."

"Only fair."

"Better get them in now. It will soon be light, and we don't know when those brats of Americans will be around again."

"Yes, darn 'em. If it wasn't for the danger of exposing us, I'd do worse than merely frighten them with this fooling."

"They don't seem to be easily frightened."

"Not as easy as that big fool she had here before."

"When do you expect No. 2?"

"She'll probably be down to-morrow night or the night after."

"Do you think you can send her away with a cargo?"

"It all depends upon those boys."

"Why?"

"They've taken to watching the herds like hawks."

"Then we'll have to devise some means of getting rid of them."

"Easier said than done."

"I don't see it. We got rid of the other superintendent."

"He was soft, even if he was a big, hulking brute. This lot is different."

"Who are they, and where did they come from?"

"Felipe doesn't know for certain himself, for the señora doesn't trust him as she did."

"Well, how much does he know?"

"They are from a long way north. Their leader's name is Strong—Ted Strong, I think he said."

"Whew!" A whistle of surprise greeted the mention of Ted's name.

"Why, do you know him?"

"I should say so. I was up in 'Frisco when this young fellow Strong turned a trick up there in China town that beat the police and the United States marshal's office. He's a shrewd one."

"Who, and what is he?"

"From what I could learn he is a ranchman, but ha



I been appointed deputy United States marshal, with a roving commission."

"That's bad for us if anything should slip."

"Which mustn't occur."

"We'll do our best. But if worst come to worst there is a way to get rid of him."

"How's that?"

"The Rat' will catch him off guard, and his knife will do the rest."

"I am opposed to violence. It would lead to a thorough search, and we cannot afford to lose our plant. It cost too much."

"Captain Astley, I know that as well as you. But here I remain all the time, while you travel back and forth and do not know the danger that constantly menaces us."

"Hush! Do not mention my name."

"There is no one here that knows it."

But at the mention of the name Ted started, and set a small stone rolling.

"What was that?" The voice was that of the man who had been called Captain Astley.

"I heard nothing. What is the matter with 'the Rat'? He knows very well there is no time to waste if we are to get this stuff down before light."

"You are not in a very amiable frame of mind tonight, Bodley."

"Not that name!"

"I keep forgetting. The old times in London and Chili come up every time I see you, and I do not think of your new name of Braglin."

"Well, both are notorious enough in the States now. That is the only reason why I would consent to coop myself up here until things blow over."

"If we could only call that hound off."

"You mean Darbey O'Neil? What do you hear of him?"

"Next to Nick Carter he is the most elusive man in the United States."

"With all your resources, and the freedom to come and go which you enjoy, as well as your income, you should be able to locate that fellow and get him out of the way."

"You don't know how hard that is. Why, he is one of the most expert men in the world at disguise, and you might brush against him a dozen times a day, as well as you knew him in his own person, you would not detect him."

Ted, who was listening to this with wonder, knew that fact well himself, and he also knew Captain Astley and Brooks Bodley, but by reputation, and he hugged himself that he had obeyed the waking impulse to come here.

Another voice was added. It apparently came from some hollow.

"Hand down another box," it said.

"See here, Rat, you must hurry. What kept you so long?"

"A leak."

"Get it fixed?"

"Yes. How many more have you?"

"Eight."

A volley of oaths followed from the hollow.

"Here, stow that. We don't want Miss Astley to be subjected to that sort of thing."

"It slipped out. I'm so used to it here."

"Well, keep your tongue between your teeth."

This was followed by growls.

"Keep that brute below. Chain him up."

"I daren't touch him."

"You're a coward."

"So will you be one of these days, when he gets you."

Now there were howls and snarling noises below, and a man's voice in anger.

"Take that, you brute!" followed by the dull thud of blows.

In a moment there were whines.

"You mustn't beat my dog like that, Mr. Bodley," said the girl's voice. "I cannot permit it."

"I can't help it. I won't have him running all over the place. Some of these days he'll betray us."

These voices came to Ted faintly, as if they were from the bottom of a well.

In fact, the whole thing was mysterious and wonderful. There was no ray of light to enable Ted to see where the speakers were or what they were engaged in.

"Better come down," said the voice attributed to Bodley or Braglin.

"All right," answered that of Captain Astley.

Ted heard a scuffling noise and muffled blows as on iron.

Then there was silence.

Ted sighed and rose from his cramped and uncomfortable position, elated at the information now in his possession.

Suddenly a shaft of light shot up from somewhere down in the water, and Ted saw what appeared to be a seaweed-covered island off the cliff, where one had never been before. On it lay a box about two feet square.

Beside the box was a square hole, like a trap.

In the shaft of light there appeared for an instant the face of a man. But in that instant Ted fixed it in his memory.

It was the face of a man of superior intelligence, pale and good-looking, but now it bore a terrified expression.

"Who turned on that light?" he said, with an oath.

It was the voice of Bodley, or Braglin.

Then the island began to sink, and the head disappeared from sight.

This was followed by the clang of iron.

"They are shutting a trap-door," muttered Ted, as he watched this with eager eyes.

Darkness followed instantly. There was a slight wash of water against the wall of the cliff. Then silence reigned supreme.

It was one of the most remarkable and mysterious things that ever had come within the experience of the King of the Wild West.

What were they doing? What had they there?

These were the questions that flashed into Ted's mind.

He had read of Captain Astley, the millionaire ship-owner of San Francisco, who was also one of the merchant princes of the Pacific coast, and he remembered reading months ago of Brooks Bodley, once the best-known young man of fashion in San Francisco, who had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from his former haunts.

The newspapers had hinted at reasons which could not be made public. Evidently Darby O'Neill knew.

After listening for several minutes Ted rose. It was



still dark, but daylight would soon be on, and he did not want to be seen in the neighborhood.

He had not gone more than a hundred yards, however, when something struck him on the shoulder. The blow evidently had been intended for his head, but had missed by the fraction of an inch.

Almost simultaneously a man grasped him, and Ted turned upon him in a very fury of strength and rage.

He felt the coat of his assailant tear asunder as he threw him aside and heard him fall upon the rocks, then take to his heels.

But he was attacked on the other side, and as this other enemy caught him low down to throw him, Ted's fingers found his throat, and his disengaged fist struck two blows which brought moans.

Then the second man tore away from him, and fled into the night.

Who could have attacked him?

Who but traitors at the ranch!

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FLOATING ALUMINUM BOX.

Some one knocked at Ted's door as he was dressing, for he had gone to bed directly after his adventure on the cliff, and, as he was almost dressed, he threw it open and saw standing on the threshold Felipe, the segundo.

"I called to get orders for the day, señor," said Felipe, smiling and bowing low. "I trust the señor rested well."

"Yes, thank you, Felipe, very well," answered Ted. "But what has happened to your eye? It is black and swollen. Not fighting, I hope?"

"It was a piece of stupidity on my part, señor, that caused the bruise," answered the segundo, with a flush.

"Of what sort?"

Ted could not repress a smile as he noted the sly look of suspicion which the Mexican cast at him.

"I thought I heard an unusual noise in the horse-corral this morning before daylight, and arose hurriedly from my bed. I was half-asleep as I walked across the dark room, and ran into the edge of the door. I assure you it was very startling and painful, señor."

"It must have been," said Ted curtly. "I would advise against being up before daylight. There are no orders."

Felipe bowed and showed his teeth in what was, intended for a smile, but was more like an animal grin of fear and cunning.

Ted, from the doorway, watched him walk away.

"So he was the last one who tackled me, eh? I wonder if he knew it was me. I half-suspect he does, and that he came here to see if I had been to bed. Now, I wonder who his companion was."

He wandered over to the big house to take a casual look at the other servants and hangers-on, and came across a fellow named Florio, a sort of Spanish minstrel, who played the guitar and mandolin of nights for the edification of the servants about the house.

Such a hanger-on is often permitted at the big Mexican ranch-houses to amuse the servants and to make them more contented to stay in their positions.

Florio had made his appearance at the ranch several days before the arrival of the young rough riders, and

asked permission to stay there a while for his board. As there was no musician at the ranch at that time Señora Tarrazza had given him permission to do so. Except to play and sing in the evenings Florio was an idler.

Like others of his class, he affected a fancy, braided jacket, and a decorated sombrero, and it was part of his duty to make pretended love to the maids, and keep them in good humor. He was never seen without his jacket, as it was the badge of his profession of minstrelsy.

Ted met him in the patio, leaning against a door smoking a cigarette and chatting with one of the maids.

He was without his jacket.

"Eh, Florio, where is your jacket?" said Ted, in a jesting way.

"Señor knows that I am poor," said Florio. "A man passed early in the morning, and as he admired the jacket and would buy it, and I needed his money and the weather is warm, I sold it to him."

And Florio looked Ted squarely in the eye.

"Money spent in the summer is not as warm as a jacket worn in the winter," said Ted, applying a well known Spanish proverb. Whereat the minstrel laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"There is the other," said Ted to himself, and smiled as he went off to breakfast.

He was very silent during the meal, for he was thinking over the events of the night, and wondering how much Felipe and Florio had to do with the disappearance of the cattle, and why they had been so near the vanishing island at the time they had attacked him.

The thing that caused him most thought was whether the two Mexicans knew whom they were attacking when they had tried to seize and perhaps murder him but a few hours ago.

"What's the matter, Ted?" asked Stella. "You haven't said a word this morning, only sit there and scowl at your breakfast. Don't you like it? I supervised it myself this morning."

"Certainly I like it," said Ted, looking up and smiling. "Do you think I would have eaten as much of it if it wasn't the best we've had in a week? I was just wondering about the mermaid, and where she is, and if we shall see her again."

"So you got mermaid on ther brain, too," said Bud with a grin. "Yer want ter look out er Carl'll be challengin' yer ter a dool on ther sands—schmeircase and pumpernickel fer two."

They all laughed at this, and the conversation became general, and Ted postponed his thinking until another time. But he did not say anything about what he had seen and heard in the early morning.

"Say, Bud, I want to see you this morning," said Ted. "Let Carl go over the range alone. Carl, keep your eyes peeled for mermaids and things to-day. I want Bud to help me do some work around the house."

"Und if I der mairmait see to-day, by chiminy, capcher her alretty, und bring her home, vat?" said Carl with a grin, as he rode away.

When the boys had all departed for their sections of the range, and Stella had gone for a ride with the daughter of Señora Tarrazza, with whom she had become warm friends, Ted and Bud wandered down to the cliff.

Ted wanted to consult with his lieutenant, for he knew he could trust the level head of Bud in counsel.

They walked along, Ted telling all that had occurred



and of his discovery with regard to Felipe and Florio, holding back nothing.

"Now, what do you think?" he said when he finished.

"Yer shore got my head buzzin'," answered Bud. "O' course, thar's only one thing ter think: this yere Captain Astley an' ther other feller is in ther cattle-stealin' business, but they've got every other kind o' rustler I ever heerd of beat a city block. But how do they do it?"

"That's what you and I must find out," said Ted.

"We can't work more than double in this. If we set all the boys to it we would only injure our own chances. It would be like a detective going to capture a thief with a brass band."

"What do yer propose?"

"We must bait them with that Domino herd."

"I guess they already hev thar eyes on ther bait. I'll tell yer one thing, some one has been drivin' the herd to whar Captain Astley needs it most, fer some time."

"You mean that Astley and his people have some one on the ranch bribed to deliver the cattle to them?"

"Ther same. An' his other name is Felipe."

"Then we must catch them at it."

"I'm game. How?"

"You watch half the night, and I the other."

"No sooner said than done. We'll begin ter-night, I reckon."

"To-night."

"Say, Ted, hev yer cogitated on ther fact thet a feller like Astley ain't here jest ter steal a few head o' cattle. I don't mean that a few thousand head o' beef critters what yer didn't hev ther trouble an' expense ter raise in what come ter yer fer nothin' is not ter be sneezed at by a crook. But this yere Astley, accordin' ter your say, which is good ernough fer me, is a rich ship-owner an' merchant. Now, it don't look reasonable ter me thet he would bother ter sneak erlong here in a submarine, which ain't ez cheap ez peanuts, jest fer ther chance o' pickin' a few heifers."

"I've thought of that."

"No, an' then he spoke o' a plant. O' course he don't mean no gyarden plant, no posy. Thar's somethin' under ther water what means a hull lot if we kin fish it up."

"The thing I saw sink, eh?"

"Yes, although thet might hev been jest a raft, what should be pulled under the water. Thar's somethin' big spar."

They had come to the steps cut in the cliff, leading to the bathing-beach.

"Let's have a plunge in the sea," suggested Ted.

"I'm with you."

They climbed down to the beach, stripped, and plunged in.

"What's thet floatin' off thar," said Bud, pointing out to the water.

Something of a yellow color was floating beneath the surface.

"I'm going out to see," said Ted, swimming toward the object.

"Look out for one of them octopuses. I hear they're mighty frequent in these yere waters," cried Bud, as the king of the Wild West clove the water with mighty strokes.

"It's a box," Ted called back. "Shall I bring it in?"

"Yep; want any help?"

Ted shook his head, and began pushing the box before him. It was weighted so that it would float end

up just beneath the surface of the water, safe from detection, except from those who were intended to find it.

"By Jove, it looks like the box that was on top of the island when it sank last night," said Ted, as he waded out of the water with it and threw it on the beach.

"Keerful thar, pardner," cried Bud. "Don't never throw strange boxes ner strange men around. Yer never can tell what they're loaded with. Some boxes an' some men is filled with breakfast food, an' ag'in some is charged with dynnymite."

"I guess this one's all right," laughed Ted. "It didn't explode."

"Which is why you're here ter say so. Ef it hed been dynnymite yer wouldn't need ter apolergize."

"Well, let's get into our clothes and take it up to the house and open it. Here may be our clue. Probably it is one of the sixteen boxes Captain Astley was so anxious about this morning."

They carried the box into Ted's room and pried the lid off.

"Keerful, now," exclaimed Bud, when he saw that it was filled with fine cork-dust. "Thar may be an explosive propersition in thar."

"You've explosions on the brain this morning," grunted Ted, who was trying to ram his fingers through the solidly packed cork-dust.

"Whoever packed thet did a good job," said Bud. "Better let me loosen it up some with this hatchet."

The cork was solid, yet springy, and it was some time before they got it out.

"What d'ye think it is?" said Bud. "I'll give yer three guesses."

"Do your own guessing," laughed Ted. "But, somehow, I've a hunch."

"Your hunches air pretty good ones. Let us have it."

"It's something on which the United States duties are pretty high, and on which no duty has been paid."

"Wow! That's ther lay, eh? I hadn't thought that far."

"I may be mistaken, but I have thought, as you did, that Astley and his man Bodley were not just cattle-rustlers, although there was pretty good money in them."

All the while he was digging out the cork, and presently his fingers scratched on something harder.

"There's another box in here," he said.

"Get it out," said Bud, who was now as eager as a small boy to see what was in it.

"I will as soon as I can get to it. Here she comes. By Jove! It's metal—a casket."

He dragged forth a metal box, which was covered with dust that neither could make out of what sort it was until Ted had wiped it off. Then they saw that the box was made of aluminum, the edges of which had been carefully soldered until the casket was air-tight and water-proof. It was about six inches long, three inches deep, and four inches wide.

They looked at it curiously as Ted weighed it in the palm of his hand.

"Anything else in ther big box?" asked Bud. "Thet's a mighty big box ter contain only that much freight."

Ted ran his hand through the ground cork.

"I guess that's all," he answered. "No, here's something else."

He pulled out a small canvas sack, which was quite



heavy for its bulk. The sack was tightly sewed at the seams.

"Gold-dust!" exclaimed Bud.

"We'll soon see," said Ted, ripping open the upper seam with his penknife.

He poured some of the contents into the palm of his hand.

Certainly, it was not gold, for it was black.

Taking it to the window, he examined it.

"What is it?" asked Bud.

"Iron filings."

"What!"

"I begin to see it's use," said Ted thoughtfully. "What end of the box did I take it from? This end."

He turned the box up and looked at the other end.

"As I thought. See this ring? Yes. Well, you remember when you saw the box it was floating end up below the surface. The box was weighted with this bag of iron filings so that it would float at just such a distance below the surface, and was made so bouyant with the cork that it would not be likely to sink altogether no matter how roughly it was used."

"Well, I don't see ther object fer goin' ter all thet trouble."

"You will in a minute. This ring is for the purpose of fastening a line to the box just four feet long."

"Gee! Yer don't say. My, but ye hev a head fer figgers."

"Think it out for yourself. When we got the box it was just four feet under water, and the only reason you saw it at all was because of the shallowness of the water and the fact that the sunlight penetrated clear to the bottom and brought out the yellow color of the wood."

"Still, my usually nimble wit fails to grasp that line yer threw out a minute ago."

"Suppose that this is part of a smuggler's booty. Should the ship which was carrying it be held up by a revenue-cutter this box would be tossed overboard. But before going over a line, just as long as the depth of the submersion of the box, with a buoy attached to it, would be tied to this ring. The revenue-cutter fellows would pass it by, but the chap who owned it would know what to look for when the cutter had passed on. Sabe?"

"I do. 'Tis a great noddle ye've got. I wish mine wuz half as luminous."

"I confess that it puzzled me to know, for a time, why smugglers should indulge in such a large package when space is so valuable, but this explains it. Where this box came from revenue-officers must be thick."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FLORIO CHANGES FACES.

"This yere breakfast food," said Bud, running his fingers through the ground cork, "an' a bag o' iron filin's is mighty interestin', but I'm pinin' ter see what's inside o' ther little box."

"All right, here goes. Hold on ter your eyes, they might pop out," said Ted, as with his knife he cut away one corner of the top of the box and began to pry the lid off.

Apparently the box was filled with fine sawdust.

Bud snorted with disgust.

"Jumpin' sand-hills!" was all he could say.

"Looks as if we struck a regular breakfast-food mine," laughed Ted, continuing to dig the sawdust out gingerly.

"Here we are," he said at last, lifting out a package of white tissue-paper about as large as his thumb.

Breathlessly Bud watched him unwrap it, and turn something from it into his palm.

"Great jugs of joy!" shouted Bud, his eyes almost starting from his head.

In Ted's palm lay a diamond as large as a hazelnut, which shone even in the dim room like a bit of petrified light, sparkling brilliantly at every tremble of his hand.

After looking at it for a few moments with awe and admiration, Ted rewrapped the stone, and, laying it carefully aside, reached into the aluminum box again, and, after fumbling around, brought out another package.

In this were several diamonds, not as large as the first, but quite as brilliant.

"Talk erbout yer richness," said Bud. "Wouldn't a feller with a few o' them rocks on his person light up a street on a dark night?"

"I felt some more in there."

"Dump ther whole mess out. This business o' diggin' 'em out one by one gives me nervous prosperity."

Ted spread a paper on the table and emptied the contents of the aluminum box upon it. There were at least a dozen of the packages of tissue-paper.

"I didn't know thar wuz so much wealth in 'ther world," sighed Bud.

"Remember, this is only one of sixteen boxes," said Ted, recalling what he had seen from the cliff.

"One's enough fer me. You can have ther rest."

"Well, let's see what is in the other packages."

But it grew monotonous after a while, this exposing to their gaze large and brilliant diamonds one after the other until they made a blaze of light on the top of the table when Ted spread them out.

"Take 'em away," exclaimed Bud, after gazing upon them with dazzled eyes, for he had not handled one of them yet. "They make me feel like committing murder."

"Isn't it strange the effect the cold, hard, brilliant things have on one? I know they don't belong to us, and I would have no use for them if I owned them, and yet—"

There was a slight noise on the veranda near the window, and Ted stepped swiftly to it and looked out.

Just as he did so Florio, the minstrel, stepped in front of him.

Ted's hand was on the butt of his revolver as Florio looked into the room, and his eyes fell upon the glittering mass of diamonds on the table.

For an instant an expression of amazement appeared on his face and was quickly suppressed, and he smiled in his lazy Mexican way.

"Well, what is it?" asked Ted in a sharp, cold voice, not at all like his usual tone. The diamonds had got on his nerves.

"Señor, the Señora Tarrazza sent me over to see if you were here, and to beg the obligation of a visit from you."

"Was that all, Florio," said Ted calmly, but with a harshness that was strange even to himself. He threw a quick look over his shoulder and saw that Bud was standing between the window and the diamonds.



"Tell the señora that I shall do myself the honor to call upon her immediately."

"Gracias, señor."

Florio sauntered away gracefully and lazily, and Ted watched him until he turned the corner, but could he have seen the minstrel's face he would have been surprised.

The Mexican winked and smiled and drew down the corners of his mouth with evident amusement, and when he got around the corner he slapped his knee and went into a spasm of noiseless laughter.

"Did he see them?" asked Bud.

"Yes, he saw them, and now we shall have the devil's own time guarding them until we can turn them over to the proper authorities. It wouldn't surprise me if murder was done for them yet, as perhaps they have caused murder before."

"What are we to do with them?"

"The señora wishes to see me, and I must go over to the other house. I will leave them with you. Wrap them up and put them in your inside pocket, and guard them with your gun in your hand until I get back. Shove the boxes under the bed out of sight. I wish we'd never found the things, for the Lord only knows what they're worth, and there's a dozen murders in every one of them."

"Come back soon," said Bud, in the tone of one who has been left alone in a haunted house. Ted laughed at the expression on Bud's face and the tone of his voice, and at last they were both laughing at their sudden terrors of a mere handful of glittering stones which had suddenly come into their possession.

Ted departed, and Bud locked the door, and sat on the edge of the bed with his eyes fastened on the window, momentarily expecting to see the head of the Mexican peer around the edge of it, and he resolved that if it did he would take a shot at it.

But Florio was in the patio of the big house, tipped back against the wall in his chair, softly twanging his guitar and singing a Spanish love-song to the admiration of the kitchen-maids.

Señora Tarrazza wished to talk to Ted about the conditions of the ranch and to compliment him on the fact that since he had been there not a herd of cattle had been stolen, for she did not blame him for the cattle stolen the night of their arrival, and not a fight had occurred among the vaqueros. For an hour Ted stayed, chatting with his employer, then returned to Bud.

When he tried the door he heard Bud leap to his feet, and the gruff demand:

"Who's thar, an' what d'ye want?"

"Let me in, Bud; it's Ted."

"Yere, take them di'monds. I won't pack them another minit. They're gittin' me dippy."

"All right, I'll take them. A walk in the sunshine has relieved me of all fear of them. Go and take a walk, and you'll get over it, too."

"Come on, we'll saddle up an' take a ride around ther range, an' see what's goin' on," said Bud, who was not much of a walker.

In a few minutes they were galloping over the brown hills toward the south to see how Kit and his herds were prospering in Mexico.

After supper that night Bud quietly disappeared from the group sitting on the yeranda, and when Stella in-

quired for him Ted said that he was doing some work, and would not be in until after bedtime.

Bud had gone on the first watch that he and Ted were to keep on the cliff. Ted was to go on watch at one o'clock.

He had taken Ben into his confidence with regard to the diamonds.

"Ben," he said, "guard these as you would your life. Sleep with them under your body and with your gun in your hand. If any of these Mexicans get on to the fact that we have them, not a life in the house will be safe."

Ben promised to take care of the precious stones, of which Ted promised to relieve him in the morning.

Ted retired early, and at one o'clock was walking stealthily along the cliff to where he was to relieve Bud.

They were soon together.

"Anything doing?" asked Ted in a whisper.

"Not a thing, except that about an hour ago I thought I heard a noise off there on the range as if some one was walking softly, but I did not hear it again, and I suppose it was only the wind. I could see nothin'."

"All right, skiddoo back to the house and go to bed. I'll take the watch."

Bud crept away so noiselessly that when he was out of sight, which was as soon as he got three feet away, Ted heard him no more.

Then began his own long vigil.

The night was dark and absolutely still, except for the soft wash of the water along the cliff.

Far away he could occasionally hear the low of a cow in one of the herds, and nearer some of the cattle of the Domino herd chewing their cuds.

Ted was listening intently for sounds from the water below, but there were none of the noises with which he had now become familiar.

He had not forgotten the words of Bodley to Astley that "No. 2" was due this very night, or the next.

This could mean only one thing, another submarine boat, or a ship.

The discovery of the diamonds had added zest to the solving the mystery of the Santa Ysabel Ranch.

He was convinced that Señora Tarrazza knew nothing of the proximity of a mysterious submarine that visited her shore to steal her cattle, and perhaps make a rendezvous for smugglers.

There were many mysteries connected with this part of the coast that must be cleared up, and while Ted had found plenty of evidence he was as far from the source of it as ever.

As for the strange, seaweed-covered thing he had seen in the flash of light the night before, it certainly appeared to be an island, but whoever heard of an island that appeared and vanished at will?

But, after all, his business was to find out how the cattle had disappeared and were disappearing from the ranch, and put a stop to it forever. And so the hours wore on with him thinking the whole matter over and over from every point of view, but arriving no nearer a solution.

By the changing positions of the stars he kept track of the time as the night wore on into morning. It would soon be daylight, and nothing had happened to excite his attention. Probably, he thought, the submarine boat, if it was a submarine boat that he had heard, had put out to sea for the time being, and that to-night was one of those in which nothing was to happen.



He had just made up his mind to go back to the house and to bed when he heard a stirring noise not far away, and his acutely trained senses told him that a man was approaching from the north.

If he continued on his way he must pass close to Ted, who shrank back and scarcely breathed.

The sound came closer. It was almost inaudible, but Ted knew it for the movement of a man walking slowly and carefully.

He was between Ted and the sea, and in a few minutes he passed like a ghost.

Ted could see his body black against the western sky, which was growing less and less dark as morning approached, and the false dawn was not far away.

The man passed, and Ted followed even more silently.

Once the man stopped and appeared to be listening, as if he had heard some one on his trail, and Ted stooped and waited until he went on again.

After the man had got beyond the ken of the "bewitched" cliff, as the boys for convenience called the place of the sound and the mermaid, he threw caution aside and walked on briskly and apparently without fear.

But Ted did not relax his caution, for the man was going in the direction of the big house.

Was this one of the traitors, disappointed also in the arrival of "No. 2"?

Ted was getting closer and closer to the man he was following.

He could detect something familiar in the fellow's manner of walking, and suddenly it dawned upon him that it was Florio, the minstrel.

On they went, the pursued and the pursuer. Florio, if it was he, evidently confident now that he was not being followed, was going quite recklessly, even humming a tune, and making so much noise that Ted could be relieved of the strain of absolute silence.

They were close to the big house when Florio turned to one of the outhouses, a small structure of adobe, in which he evidently lodged.

Ted heard him open the door, close it, lock it, and strike a light, and crept up close to try to get a glimpse within the place.

But when he got close to the house he became aware that a fight was going on inside. Florio had been surprised in his home-coming.

The fight was a serious one, too, for there was a fierce stamping of feet, tables and chairs went over, and muttered curses were jerked out as blows were given or received.

Several men seemed to be fighting. Without doubt Florio was in a dangerous position, and was fighting against heavy odds.

But as yet there had not been a cry from within.

Ted stepped back a few feet and rushed at the door. He couldn't stand back and see a fight go against any man under such conditions.

The door went in with a crash, and for an instant the fighting stopped, but immediately began again. This time it was Florio who began it.

Ted had drawn his revolver, but he did not use it. He saw a man bending over Florio with a knife in his hand, about to plunge it into the unfortunate minstrel.

The knife was descending when Ted sprang forward and with a terrific blow on the neck sent the knifer into a corner. It was Bodley, the man whose face Ted had seen in the flash of light

Florio had picked up a chair and was swinging it around his head. It sent the other man staggering against the wall. The third slipped past and out into the night, eluding Ted, who recognized Felipe, but failed to capture his Mexican segundo.

Bodley was up and groping for his knife, but he could not find it, and he, too, rushed out. The man who had been knocked against the wall slipped out, also, and their combined footsteps could be heard beating a tattoo on the rocks along the cliff as they ran.

Florio was leaning against a table breathing heavily.

Soon he recovered and, turning to Ted, reached out his hand.

"Just in time, Ted," he said.

It was Darbey O'Neill.

## CHAPTER IX.

### OVER THE CLIFF'S EDGE.

During the fight the black curly wig and the false mustache had been torn from Florio, and there was revealed the calm, determined face of the United States secret agent, Darbey O'Neill.

"Great Scott! Where did you come from?" asked Ted, in wonder.

"Valparaiso, Chili, South America," answered O'Neill, as calmly as if he had just stepped from around the corner.

"You're a wise old fowl," said Ted, with a grin.

"Same to you," answered the government agent, without crackling a smile.

"Since when did you come to be carrying messages for Señora Tarrazza?"

"I didn't. I wanted to see what you had found, and I took the message from the peon who was sent to you with it."

This, of course, referred to when Ted caught Florio, or O'Neill, at the window.

"Well, what do you know?" asked Ted.

"Not quite as much as you, from present indications."

"Yes, you do. Else you wouldn't have come to this out-of-the-way place all the way from Valparaiso, Chili. Not if I know it."

Darbey O'Neill smiled. "I like to prowl around in these Southern countries. You remember I saw you in Mexico when you found the buried treasure under Chapultepec."

"I know you like Southern countries, but only when there is something in your line going on."

"Why else? I don't fancy Spanish cooking well enough to come for that."

"I suppose you saw what you wanted to when you looked into my room yesterday."

"I saw what I expected to see."

"Then you knew——"

"I knew that diamonds and other precious stones were being smuggled from South Africa into this country by way of Valparaiso. In that city I accidentally ran across my friend Bodley, whom I previously had met in London, New York, and San Francisco. He didn't want to see me, though."

"So I heard."

"Tell me about it."

"In a moment. You haven't finished yet. How did you know he was here?"



"In Valparaiso I ran across another man whom the authorities in Washington were anxious to see again, and gathered him in. We had a little talk. Bodley had escaped under my very nose, which is reasonably keen on the scent. It made me sore. I wanted to know how he did it. My friend 'the Rat,' as he is called, told me——"

"Ah!"

"You were going to say——"

"The Rat' is here."

"I know it. I knocked him against the wall with a chair during the few interesting moments after your arrival in the room. He told me all, and I let him go, for I knew that he would lead me to Bodley sooner or later."

"What did he tell you?"

"Of course you are in on this, or I wouldn't say a word. He told me that Bodley had gone north on a boat known as 'No. 1,' which was engaged in the 'trade.'"

"That is to say, smuggling."

"Exactly. I know 'the Rat' better than he knows himself, and we set out from Valparaiso together, he as a clergyman, I as a musician in the band of the steamship *Pizarro*, although he didn't know it, and he listened to my music every evening in the saloon at dinner, while I ate with the crew."

"I didn't know you were so accomplished."

"Mere tricks of the trade for the purposes of disguise. We landed at San Diego, and both of us changed disguises. I knew his, but he didn't know mine. Here I am, and he is waiting for 'No. 2' to carry him away to safer climes."

"How do you know?"

"By knowing 'the Rat' so well."

"Who is 'the Rat'? Surely that is not his name."

"No, his name is Jack Rattray, the famous New Zealand counterfeiter and all around crook, wanted in a half-dozen European capitals, and all over the world, for that matter."

"Did you know where he went after he reached here?"

"No, I lost sight of him at once. But then you came, and I knew that you would fall into something good soon, and perhaps unconsciously lead me to my bird, and you did."

"How?"

"By discovering those lights at sea the first night you were here, and from subsequent discoveries of yours. I shouldn't have gone about it the way you did, and probably would have missed it altogether. But you, in seeking to protect the cattle, did both yourself and me the favor of getting at the shell of the most important criminal turn-up of the year."

"Yes, that's it. I have only got at the shell."

"But you'll reach the heart of it, if I'm not mistaken, before many hours have passed. The discovery of the box floating in the sea cinched it. I saw that box myself before you did, but I passed it by. That is what comes of being fresh at the business. When I saw you drag that box ashore I knew you had the evidence I should have got first."

"You say you saw the box before I did. You are mistaken, unless you saw it in Valparaiso."

"What? You saw it before it was floating off the cliff?"

"I did."

"Sit down here and tell me all about it now from the beginning. I sha'n't interrupt you. You have beaten me at my own game."

"First, tell me how you knew that I had made any discoveries?"

"My boy, I was your shadow. I waited upon you at the table, for I have been two men here, and I overheard what you told your friends. I was an ignorant Mexican servant who did not understand English, you know."

"Great guns, which one?"

"Enrico."

Ted looked at O'Neill searchingly, hardly believing it possible that a man could so change his appearance and personality.

"I shall discharge Enrico the first thing," he said, laughing.

"I wish you would, now that you and I know one another. The job of keeping two men going is getting a bit strenuous. I am afraid one or two of the housemaids are getting suspicious of either Enrico or me. Yes, send Enrico away. I don't like him."

They laughed at the duality of the position Darbey O'Neill had been carrying on. Then Ted proceeded with his account of his movements and his discoveries and theories, and when he ended O'Neill said:

"Rather daring thing of Miss Astley to pretend to be a mermaid, and show herself as she did. But I know her for a most courageous and adventurous young woman, and nothing that she would do would surprise me."

"I suppose her mermaid stunt was the thought of Bodley, by means of which he thought to frighten us away."

"Yes, and I believe it is through her that we shall arrive at the heart of this mystery."

"After what I have told you about the lights, the thud of the machinery, and the vanishing island, what do you make of it?"

"Submarine No. 1, and submarine No. 2."

"That is my idea, and yet we may both be mistaken. At all events, whoever is at the head of 'the mystery,' which is the only name by which I can call it, has a most ingenious mind."

"Bodley."

"But Bodley made a fool-play when he tackled you here."

"Not so very. If you hadn't appeared on the scene when you did my body would be floating out with the tide at this moment. I can't imagine anything Bodley desires more than my extermination."

"Well, I'm going to bed. We shall see one another again."

Ted was up and out at 7 o'clock, having slept three hours.

He immediately sent for Felipe, the segundo.

Felipe was not to be found. The vaquero, who had ridden the entire range in search of him, came in late with the information that Felipe had not been seen since the previous evening. It was believed at the big house that some accident had befallen the segundo, but the King of the Wild West knew that Felipe was on his way to Mexico as fast as his horse could carry him, and that he would never more be seen at Santa Ysabel.

During the morning Florio, the minstrel, appeared in



the patio as usual to amuse the maids with his music, but he did not put as much spirit into it as usual.

Meeting him, Ted spoke of the disappearance of Felipe.

"Why did you and Felipe attack me the other night out on the cliff?" asked Ted.

"Was that you? I am glad to know it. I knew that Felipe was a traitor, and I was trying to make him talk. I caught him out on the cliff and inquired why he was there at such an hour. He was a bad liar, was Felipe, and I soon caught him napping. Then I made him believe that I knew all. When we saw you on the cliff we both thought you were Bodley, for you are of the same height and build as that accomplished rascal."

"But why did you attack me?"

"I thought Bodley was following me, and Felipe, thinking that Bodley believed that he had betrayed something and was on his trail, suggested that we 'do' Bodley up. I knew that Bodley would kill me if he could, and so we tackled you. But we made a mess of it. I didn't know you were so strong. Of course, when you spoke to me in the patio I suspected that you knew that I had been up to something, but, honestly, I believed, until you told me to the contrary, that it was Bodley."

"Well, don't make such a mistake again," said Ted, laughing.

Ted felt safer about the diamonds now that he knew who the alleged minstrel was, and locked them up in his room, much to Ben's relief.

Ted and the boys did not go near the cliff during the day. They were content to attend to the duties of the ranch. Ted even kept away from all thought of the cliff. He knew that there would be no attempt to steal the cattle, even if that should be the purpose of the precious Bodley, in the daytime, and that the Domino herd was as safe grazing near the edge of the cliff as if not a single steer had ever been lifted from the ranch. To-night might come the crisis, but not to-day.

It had been better, perhaps, for his own peace of mind later had he been at the cliff that afternoon, but not for the final solution of the problem which he had determined with all the force of his vigorous mind to solve. But he was away to the east among the hills with Ben looking after the herds that roamed that portion of the ranch.

After the siesta, or afternoon sleep, that is, between two and three o'clock, Stella came into the cool living-room where Mrs. Graham sat busy with her embroidery.

Stella was plainly out of sorts. Her siesta had been disturbed by the heat.

"I'm going for a ride," she announced to her aunt.

"But the sun," protested Mrs. Graham.

"Bother the sun," exclaimed Stella petulantly. "That's the trouble in the house. I'd rather be out under the sun and feel the wind as I rush through it, than in the house in the shade with the heat blowing in here in gusts as from a furnace."

"Very well, Stella, as you please," said her aunt patiently, "but I don't like to see you go out riding alone. You know how often things have gone wrong when you went alone. If Ted or Bud or any of the boys were here I should feel all right about it, but——"

"I'll be all right, auntie dear. Forgive me for being cross, but it was so hot and stuffy in my room that I couldn't sleep, and if I don't get out into the fresh air I'll die."

The girl kissed her aunt and bounded away, to return shortly ready for her ride.

Mrs. Graham had sent a servant to the corral to have Stella's horse brought to the house, and she mounted it, and, waving her hand to her aunt, who had come to the veranda to see her off, dashed away toward the east.

"I guess she'll be all right," said Mrs. Graham to herself, as she went back to the living-room. "This is an enclosed ranch, and she will not get into any danger."

Stella rode through the dry air with a rush that soon cooled her and drove the cobwebs of sleep from her brain, as it sent the blood coursing through her veins.

For two or three miles she rode east at a brisk gallop, then wheeled to the north and finally came upon Bud and Carl watching a herd of cattle with four vaqueros.

"Hello, Stella," said Bud. "Whar yer goin' in sech a tearin' rush?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular," cried Stella, reining up beside them. "Just out for a ride. It got too pokey in the house for me. Want to come for a dash?"

"Like ter, but I plumb cain't," said Bud regretfully. "Got ter sort out this herd this afternoon. Ted hez a notion thet he's goin' ter cut out all ther three-year-old steers, an' feed 'em up fer market. He wants ter make a piece o' money fer ther old lady. I reckon it takes a sight ter run this place, an' she's gittin' hard up. Well, so long, if yer call thet goin'."

Stella made a face at him because he would not ride with her, and was on her way again.

After going a mile to the north she turned in toward the ocean.

As she approached the cliff she saw a girl walking slowly along just ahead of her. Here was her chance to see Carl's mermaid.

Stella had no doubt that it was the mermaid, as there were no girls on the ranch except Señorita Tarrazza and herself, and the girl ahead was not the donna's daughter.

She had not been long in pursuit when the other girl, evidently hearing the hoof-beats, looked over her shoulder: then she turned and ran like a deer toward the cliff.

"Stop!" cried Stella. "I am your friend, and want to speak to you."

But at the sound of her voice the other girl quickened her footsteps, and she could run like the wind.

Stella urged her horse on. "The little fool," she said to herself, "I'll see her in spite of herself."

The girl was apparently running blindly toward the edge of the cliff.

"Stop! You'll go over and be killed!" shrieked Stella.

A mocking laugh was the only answer.

Suddenly the girl disappeared over the edge of the cliff, and the last Stella saw of her was her uplifted arms shooting downward.

Before Stella could stop her horse he was on the rocks, and was slipping forward, and she, too, shot over the edge.

## CHAPTER X.

### STELLA AND THE "SEA-DOG."

As the horse went over the edge of the cliff Stella slipped her feet free of the stirrups.

Downward they flew through the air, and as they did so Stella had presence of mind enough to look down to see if the other girl was beneath her.



Then she noticed that the tide was up, and that the strip of sand which had been visible below at low water was not there, but that the sea was half-way up the cliff.

If she could only stay on the back of the horse she might be all right yet, for she knew that it would swim, and she would stick to it and guide it down the coast to where she knew there was a sand beach.

This flashed through her mind, and then the horse fell into the water, which closed over her head, and she went down, down until all seemed black. Then she felt herself shaken from the back of the horse.

She had about given herself up for lost, when suddenly something grasped her by the arm, and she was dragged through the water.

Then her head came to the surface and she was in the air again, but in total darkness with her feet on solid ground, and up to her waist in water.

She felt herself being led gently forward, and was wading in water that momentarily became shallower.

Putting out her hand to one side it came in contact with what seemed to be a rounding wall, smooth and slimy, and she drew it back with a shudder of horror.

As she proceeded she was gasping to recover her breath. She was more puzzled than frightened, for as soon as her head came to the surface she had lost her fear of drowning, which seemed to her the most horrible thing of all.

She did not know who or what had hold of her. She heard no noise, but felt only a gentle tugging at her skirt.

"Who are you and where are you taking me?" she said, in a trembling voice after a while.

There was something uncanny about the whole thing, and she didn't know whether to feel frightened or not.

There was no answer to her inquiry.

"Why don't you answer me?" she said again.

The only reply she got to this was a sort of snuffling grunt.

Then she tried to stop, but as she did so she felt a tug at the skirt stronger and more insistent, and went on.

It was slow going because the footing was very slippery, as if it were in ooze on a solid bottom.

"I can't be walking on the bottom of the sea," said she to herself, "else my head would be under water. I wonder where I am and where I'm going."

She was soon to know. There was a faint scratching, as if on iron, then voices of men, which seemed a great way off, followed by a creaking noise, and suddenly she was in a blaze of light and saw a man run away from her, shouting:

"Close that door! Close that door!"

There was a clang of iron and a draft of warm air, and she was in darkness again, but not before she had time to see that her savior and guide was a great dog that stood by her side, and growled when she tried to move, and caught her by the skirt and held her.

Where she was and why the man had run away from her she could not imagine, but she knew that she was very uncomfortable standing there in the dark in the custody of a dog that resisted every caress with savage growls, and in wet clothes that clung to her and sent chills running up and down her spine.

After all, she thought, the dog was more of a captor than a rescuer, and seemed to be impatient that he was compelled to stay where he was so long.

"Hurry up!" came another voice in the distance. "Turn on the light, anyway."

"I'll be there in a minute." This time it was a girl who spoke. The voice was pleasant. "I'll be changed in a moment now."

The light flashed on again, and it was a few moments before Stella could accommodate her sight to the change. Then she saw that she was in a chamber with riveted iron walls in which there were three doors. One by which she had entered the strange chamber, another and smaller at one end, and another twice as large as either of the others.

From the roof hung a single electric light bulb. Except for this the chamber was absolutely bare and unfurnished, and had a musty, damp sea smell.

Every time Stella moved the dog grasped her dress in its teeth and growled ominously.

"I wish they'd hurry and get me out of this, or put me out of my misery," muttered Stella to herself. "I'm getting awfully tired and cold."

She heard footsteps not far away. The door at the farther end of the chamber swung open and a girl of about her own age entered.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting so long," said the girl, advancing with the same hospitable grace she would have exhibited in a drawing-room, and smiling strangely at Stella. "But I was changing my clothes when Jack rushed in almost scared to death, and told me that the Sea-dog had brought a woman down. I knew it was you."

She had come close to Stella now. Placing her hand on Stella's arm, she said: "Sea-dog, all right. Go to your bed."

The dog was looking up at her earnestly, and at this command growled softly in his throat and trotted off.

"Now come with me, and get some dry clothes on at once," said the girl. "You must be chilled to the bone. But you won't take cold from the sea-water. I am in it all the time, and I never have a cold."

"This surely is the mermaid," said Stella to herself. "What a lark to meet her in this way. She's pretty, and seems nice."

The girl walked rapidly from the chamber into a sort of hall, the walls of which were iron plates the same as in the chamber. Opening one of the doors, of which there were several, she ushered Stella into a small, but pretty, room. There was a warm rug on the iron floor, and the iron walls were concealed behind hangings of bright-colored chintz. A white bed stood in a corner, and there was a dressing-case and some chairs.

"Here are some dry clothes," said the girl. "Get into them, and I will have your own dried at once."

Stella soon made the change, and the girl went away with the wet garments, while Stella sat down to await her return.

In a few minutes the girl was back.

She sat in a chair not far from Stella, and for a moment or two they took stock of one another.

"We might as well get acquainted first as last," said the girl, with a laugh. "My name is Mabel Astley, what's yours?"

"Stella Fosdick. I think this is the most ridiculous way to make a call, though, towed to the front door by a dog and given dry clothes the moment I enter, instead of the usual cup of tea."

They both laughed.



"But this time you came in by the back door," said Mabel Astley.

"I was mighty glad to get in by any door. I can't swim, and it's a long ways to the top of the water when you get down as far as I did."

"I generally come in by the back door when I go out, but not the one you took."

"But how in the world did you get here? Did the dog tow you down, too?"

"Indeed, no. I just jumped, then dove and swam for it. That's nothing."

"But where am I? It is so strange. I do not understand it."

"You must ask no questions, or I will not be permitted to be friends with you."

"All right. Mum's the word. But I would like to know how that dog happened to get me."

"He was outside there, and heard you go into the water and come down. Then he swam out to you and saved you. That is part of his training. He is my dog, and I taught him that."

"It was a mighty good thing for me that you did, or I would have drowned, sure."

"Oh, no. Some of us would have rescued you. The lookout saw you come in. How in the world did you happen to do it. Not on purpose, of course."

"No, indeed. I just couldn't stop the horse, and before I seemed to know where I was, I was over. The sun was in my eyes and I didn't know how close to the edge I was. I wonder what became of the poor horse. I hope he did not drown."

"No, I think not. I saw him swimming off toward the south, following the cliff. He'll find a beach somewhere down there, and get out."

She walked to the opposite wall and drew aside a curtain.

Behind it was a round bull's-eye of heavy glass, and on the other side green water.

After a pause Mabel Astley turned to Stella and asked:

"Why did you chase me?"

"I just wanted to get acquainted with you. I suppose it was a foolish thing. I didn't mean to frighten you. I was out for a ride, and happened to see you, and I got a crazy idea into my mind that I wanted to ask you about the mermaid."

Mabel Astley burst into a gale of laughter, in which Stella joined.

"It was the funniest thing," said Mabel. "I had been for a swim, for I saw no one about, and had made a long dive and come up, and was sitting on the——"

"What?" asked Stella.

"Oh, nothing," answered Mabel, with a blush, and Stella realized that she had caught herself just in time to prevent telling something that evidently was a secret. "But it was too funny. When I came up I saw a fat boy on a horse looking at me as if he was bewitched."

"That was Carl Schwartz. He is a German and so romantic. He thought at once you were a mermaid, and, of course, fell head over heels in love with you."

"I saw that he believed I was a mermaid, and I thought I would have some fun with him. So I beckoned to him to come, and held out my arms and went through a lot of foolish pantomime, and then I saw he was in earnest, and I began to sing some verses I composed

about myself, because you know I am nearly always at sea. I was born on a yacht."

"Yes, he was able to recite them, and swears he will never forget them. I think he more than half-believes yet you are a mermaid."

"I believe he was going to jump off the cliff, when another boy caught him, and I dived and came home."

The girls grew gradually confidential, and soon Stella was telling Mabel all about the boys and their adventures, and about the ranches and ranch life, at which Mabel exclaimed ecstatically. Then she told about her own life at sea, but not a word about the place in which they were, or its purpose.

"Well, I've had an awfully nice visit," said Stella, "but I must be getting home now, or auntie and the boys will be dreadfully worried."

Mabel looked at her with a strange expression.

"I'm afraid you can't go," she said. "I can't tell you why, but you'll have to stay here a while."

This was a poser for Stella, but she thought a few moments, and then said:

"Well, if I must, I must. But you can't keep me here forever. Ted Strong will find me one of these days."

\* \* \* \* \*

Ted Strong, riding along the cliff toward the house about supper-time, saw on the sand beach below him what seemed to be a horse's head, and was about to pass by, for it seemed impossible that a horse could get down there, when he determined to make sure.

Dismounting, he walked to the edge and looked over. It was a horse, wet from swimming. Looking more closely he saw that it was the horse Stella usually rode, and he clambered down the cliff to it. It was Stella's horse, and Stella's saddle was on its back.

For an instant his heart almost stopped beating, and he became as white as paper. There was only one inference. The horse had gone into the sea from the cliff.

What had become of Stella?

He climbed the cliff in a hurry, mounted and rode rapidly to the house.

"Where is Stella?" he asked, bursting into the living-room.

"She went for a ride," said Mrs. Graham placidly, without looking up from her work.

"How long ago?"

"About two hours, I should judge, or maybe it was three."

Ted faced about and left the room.

His head was in a whirl, and his heart was sore. He knew that if Stella had gone over the cliff only a miracle could save her, but he hoped that the horse had run away from her, and had got too near the edge and fallen in. But in his heart he knew that this was unlikely.

Outside he met Bud and Ben, who greeted him boisterously, but noticing his strange manner stopped.

"What's the matter, Bunkio?" asked Bud.

Instead of replying, Ted motioned them to follow him, and led them to where they could see Stella's horse on the sands below.

"What do you think?" asked Ben, in a hushed voice.

"I don't know what to think," answered Ted, in a voice shaken with emotion. "I can only fear."

"What?"

"That she is drowned."

"This is the worst trouble that has come to us yet,"



said Ben. "Before there was always a chance, but drowned——"

"Blast me, I don't believe it," said Bud, making a great bluff at being brave, but his face was pale and his lips trembled.

"We can't tell Mrs. Graham yet," said Ted. "We'll leave the horse where it is for the present, and feed and water him down there, so that she won't get on to it. We'll profess to believe that she is lost in the hills, and will turn up all right soon."

"Dern me fer a triple-plated, oroide chump," said Bud. "What's the matter?" asked Ted.

"She rode out ter whar me an' Carl wuz gittin' ready ter cut out them steers, an' she ast me ter go ridin' with her, an' I refused."

"Which way did she ride?"

"T'ward ther cliff whar we watch."

"There's where we'll find her," said Ted, slapping his knee.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LAME BAY STEER GOES IN.

Carefully the boys searched the sea along the cliff, and just before dark Ted saw floating far out on the water in the path of the setting sun a round white object.

It was Stella's hat.

Slowly they proceeded back to the house, but still they said nothing to Mrs. Graham about the possibility of Stella having been drowned. They got fresh horses and ostensibly set forth into the hills to search for her.

"Now, fellows," said Ted. "I want you to hide out until morning, when we will make another search of the coast. I am going to haunt the cliff alone to-night."

In a cleft of the rocks near the "bewitched" cliff, Ted had hidden the skin of a bay steer so arranged with hoops and sticks that he could slip it over him, and in the dark pass for a live animal.

He had thought of this as an expedient to prevent detection if he should be in the vicinity when an attempt should be made to steal the cattle. As soon as it was dark he went to where the skin was concealed and brought it out, placing it where he could get at it quickly.

Then he sat down to watch.

It was about midnight when he heard sounds along the cliff, and was just able to distinguish the figures of several men come over the edge of the cliff. He could hear the sibilant sounds of their whispers, then they spread out, and walked noiselessly to where the Domino herd was lying.

As they got nearer the cattle rose to their feet. They did not seem in the least disturbed or frightened, and permitted the men to go among them, rousing them and driving them into a compact mass.

"Ah, they have been at this some time, getting the beasts used to them," thought Ted.

He reached for his hide and drew it over his shoulders, and wandered around the edge of the herd to the rear.

"Head off that animal over there," he heard a low voice exclaim. It was the voice of Bodley.

Ted knew that the deception would work in the dark if he didn't try to be too much like a real steer, so he pretended to be dragging one leg. It worked to perfection, apparently, for the man who was pursuing said:

"It's a lame steer."

"Then don't bother with it," said Bodley. "Gather them in close now, boys."

The cattle were moving slowly toward the cliff, Ted inside the skin lagging along behind.

Suddenly there was a grinding, creaking noise near the cliff.

Ted could not see what occasioned it on account of the cattle in front of him, and moved off to the left, where he could get a better view.

To his amazement a section of the ground seemed to drop out of sight, then a subdued light came from the cliff, and a great square hole was revealed.

Slowly and carefully the cattle were urged toward it; "Domino," the bull, in the lead. Gingerly "Domino" footed it toward the opening, sniffed at it several times, then went forward and disappeared from sight gradually.

"An incline," muttered Ted, as he dragged nearer.

"Drive that lame steer back," commanded Bodley, in a low voice.

But Ted needed no driving. He shuffled off again, having seen that the cattle were being driven down an incline into a cave beneath the cliff. This, then, was the manner in which Astley and Bodley had been able to take so many cattle without detection.

The cattle were almost all in now, having followed their leader with docility enough, under the driving and direction of the men.

It was plainly to be seen that they had been driven hither so often by these very men that they were not in the least bit alarmed when sent into the incline.

"Here, drive that lame steer in. We might as well take them all," said Bodley. "They won't be so liable to catch on to the absence of them if we get them all."

But the lame steer was reluctant about entering and kept away from the man sent to drive him, and dodged and balked, but finally consented to go down the incline, but only after the light had been shut off. Then it went down hesitatingly enough.

The heart of Ted Strong beat swiftly as he descended among the cattle at the bottom of the incline. A sudden impulse had made him take the chance, for at first he had decided to stay out, now that he knew the nature of their game. As he got to the bottom of the incline it began to slowly lower until it rested on the floor of the cave, which seemed to Ted to be a water-worn hollow in the cliff, apparently below the water-line.

As the incline descended two shutterlike pieces of iron ascended from either side and came together, closing out the square of sky which he could see by looking upward. Then there was the sound of shooting bolts, and all was absolutely dark.

The cattle seemed to be huddled together so that they could not move, and were reasonably quiet.

Ted was behind them, and he slipped out of the steer hide and worked his way to the rear wall of the cave.

Crowding along this to the right he found what seemed to be a depression in the rock, and crowded into it.

He determined to wait further developments. He had not recovered from his amazement yet at the boldness and ingenuity of the proceeding.

What next? Whatever it was, he resolved to be in at the death, for now he was sure that Stella was somewhere in this mysterious place.

He had no more than concealed himself than a large door was flung open at the front end of the cave, and a bar placed across it.



Beyond was revealed a long passage lit by electric lights.

"Gee! They certainly do things swell down here," thought Ted. "But what are they going to do with the cattle?"

He was soon to know. Two men worked themselves to the rear of the herd along the walls, and one of them passed so close to Ted that he could have touched him by reaching out.

Slowly and quietly the cattle were moved into the passage, the end of which he could not see from where he was concealed.

Soon they had all passed through the door, which was closed, and an iron bar clanged behind it, and Ted was left alone in the darkness.

Lighting a match he explored the place. It was a natural cave, the sea end of which had been closed by a wall of cement, into which was fastened an iron frame to which the door was hung.

Ted listened at the door, but could hear nothing on the other side. Then he tried to open it, but it was as immovable as the rocky walls.

The thing was to get on the other side. So far he had accomplished nothing except to find out how the cattle disappeared from the surface of the ranch. Where they were and where they were going he did not know, but to prevent their going was of more importance, and its necessity was immediate if he was to accomplish the two things that were clearly up to him now, chiefest of which was the rescue of Stella, who, he was convinced, was somewhere behind that iron door.

As he was pondering he heard a movement at the front of the cave, and stood still and listened. Some one had come into the cave. He heard a door slide, then the dripping of water. A moment later there were three knocks on the iron door, and in a few minutes the bar was taken down and the door opened.

Ted had just time to jump behind the jutting wall and conceal himself, but he had room for observation. To his astonishment he saw in the square of light a young girl, her figure dripping water.

She passed within, and the door shut after her.

Here was the clue he wanted. She had been in the water, and had come from it into the cave. He would get out by the same way. Lighting a match he searched the corner of the cave where he had heard the sliding door, and found it in the corner of the cement wall, and slid it open without difficulty.

He passed through it and closed it carefully behind him, and was in an iron tunnel just high enough for him to pass through it.

After walking about fifteen feet he found that his feet were in water that gradually increased in depth.

"It leads to the ocean," he said to himself. "Good! This is just what I wanted."

He continued on, until the water was up to his chest, then he began to swim. It was pitch-dark in the tunnel, and the water was getting deeper in it until a few feet farther he found that it was full, and to keep going he was compelled to swim beneath the surface.

But this was not for long, for suddenly he came out of the tunnel, and giving a kick shot to the top.

All about him was the tranquil ocean, and above the sky and the stars.

It was only a few feet to the cliff and he struck out for it.

By a fortunate chance his hand clutched an iron step, which was fastened to the side of the cliff, and was only wide enough for a foothold.

Turning, he located in his mind the place where he had risen from the mouth of the tunnel, then began to climb to the top. This ladder explained the sudden disappearance of the man he had seen the first night of his watch.

When he got to the top he hesitated a moment to listen. Not a sound did he hear, and pulled himself to the top of the cliff and rested.

Presently he rose and turning his face toward the house set out at a swift run, and in a few minutes was looking through the window of the living-room. Bud was sitting talking to Mrs. Graham, who was crying. Going away from the house a short distance he whistled in a peculiar manner. In a moment Bud came out on the porch, and Ted whistled again, and Bud came to him.

"Where are the boys?" whispered Ted.

"In their rooms," answered Bud.

"Get them out and here as soon as they can come, but don't let Mrs. Graham know anything about it. Send her to bed. Hurry, it is very important. I'll tell you about it as we go along."

Bud slipped away, and in a few minutes the boys were all gathered on the cliff.

"Fellows, I've got at it now," said he, "and there is work for us to do to-night."

As briefly as possible he told them the experiences of the past hour.

"All of us are going into the cave except Carl, who can't swim. I will lead you to it. Then I'm going to get inside whatever it is, if possible, and will let you into the chambers, or whatever they are, beyond. There, I am convinced, we will find Stella."

They were hurrying along the cliff and were soon at the iron ladder, down which Ted went first, and Kit, Bud, and Ben followed. Carl stayed on top of the cliff, much to his chagrin. Clay and the other boys were off in the hills, where Mrs. Graham insisted upon them going to hunt all night for Stella.

The boys slipped quietly into the water one after the other, and swam after Ted to the spot above the mouth of the tunnel. After explaining carefully what he intended to do he dived straight down and into the tunnel, and swam for it until his feet touched the bottom.

In a moment Kit was by his side, and the others followed. Then he led them to the sliding door and soon they were all in the cave.

"I'm going out again to see if there is any other way to get into what is beyond," said Ted. "There must be, and I am going to find it. Then I will let you fellows in through that door, and we will capture the whole shooting-match, or die in the attempt."

When he was on the surface of the water again he swam to the ladder and clung to it as he surveyed the surface of the water everywhere, but nothing could he see. The night was dark, but there was a sort of luminosity on the surface of the sea, and presently at some distance off he saw a black object on the water. It was of great bulk, but lay close to the surface, and seemed to be rounded on top like the back of a whale. Only the sharpest eyes could have discovered it. It was moving slowly shoreward.

Suddenly out of the water seemed to rise a dull-green



light. This was extinguished, and in a moment a red light flashed forth and went out. These were the very lights, signals no doubt, Ted had seen before.

And now his keen ears caught the faint thud of machinery, as on that other night. Ted was tingling with excitement. This was "No 2" coming in, and he now understood why the cattle had been driven into the cave.

Presently there was a heaving swell on the water, and in a moment, forty feet away from him, rose another dark bulk, on which he could see a dense growth of seaweed.

"By Jove, the vanishing island," he muttered. "This is luck."

In a moment the "island" stood about four feet above the surface of the water, and dropping softly away from the ladder Ted swam toward it, making scarcely a ripple.

In a few moments he clutched the seaweed, and clung there.

Through the weeds he could feel the iron of which the "island" was constructed.

He had not been there long when he heard bolts slip and the lifting of a trap-door, and peered cautiously upward. Then a head appeared; the head of Bodley, in a faint circle of light.

"She's coming," Ted heard him say to some one below. "I'll come down, and see that the sea-gates are all ready to open."

Then the head disappeared, and from the sounds below Ted believed that no one was there. He climbed rapidly to the top of the "island," crossed on his hands and knees to the trap, and looked down into a chamber about eight feet square.

There was a man in the chamber with his ear against a door, listening attentively. Ted dodged back. It was Felipe, the renegade segundo.

"I'll have a try for him, anyhow," thought Ted, as he lowered himself silently through the trap.

Felipe was still intent upon the door, when suddenly something dropped upon him and bore him to the floor.

There was a short struggle, and the segundo found himself on his back with Ted Strong's knee on his chest and five strong fingers at his throat.

The segundo smiled. "Darn you, Ted Strong, let me up!" he said, as with his free hand he plucked off a short black beard.

"Darbey O'Neill!" cried Ted, rising hastily. "How did you get here?"

"I came in with the cattle—and the lame bay steer."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE END OF THE "SEA-DOG."

"Why didn't you put me on to the fact that you were coming here to-night?" asked Ted.

"Didn't have time," said O'Neill. "It just occurred to me this evening, when I was certain that Felipe had skipped, to take his place with the gang here. I fixed up a disguise and it went. Evidently they were expecting me. I saw you, and knew that you were Johnny at the rat-hole, and tried to get near enough to you to tell you. Then I saw that lame steer, and took after you, but you dodged me too well, and I was afraid of giving you away. Then I saw you go down with the cattle. Great Scott, kid, but you have your nerve. But how in the thunder did you get here?"

Ted explained the situation briefly.

"We've got to get those other boys in here out of that cave," said he, "and it's up to you to do it."

"All right, I'll try it. We'll need them all."

"Hear any news of Stella?"

"Not positively. But when I was passing along the hall back there I heard two girls talking. Perhaps she is one of them."

"I hope so. What have you found?"

"The greatest scheme ever devised. 'No. 2.'—"

"Which is coming in now?"

"Good, we'll soon have action. 'No. 2,' as far as I can make out, is one of a pair of the most remarkable boats ever constructed. Both are combination submarine and surface boats. They can be sunk to any depth in harbor, or at sea for that matter, and when on the open sea brought to the surface and travel that way. They have collapsible steel masts, powerful compound, triple expansion engines of a new design, water-compartments and a lot of new things in the way of machinery which are the invention of a celebrated crook who does not go ashore, and is the engineer of 'No. 2.' My boy, if things come out all right to-night we will make a haul such as will make the country sit up and take notice."

"How about the smuggled stuff?"

"Don't know. We'll have to take our chances on that when the blow-up comes. If you hadn't come I was going on 'No. 2' as a cattle-drover."

"Where are the cattle?"

"They were driven through here into a large loading-room just beyond this. I was left here on guard while they all went to help get the boat alongside. From what I overheard she came in partially submerged, and when alongside of this precious old tank, which is capable of rising or falling by means of machinery which Macfarlane, the engineer I spoke about, invented, she sinks, and they load her through sea-gates, and unload her the same way. This place is simply a sort of half-way station between Chili and the United States."

"The smugglers don't go all the way through, then."

"No. As I get it from the men, there are three of them here. 'No. 1' sails between here and Chili, and 'No. 2' between here and San Francisco, making San Diego her ostensible southern terminus."

"Great scheme, eh?"

"Well, I should say. That room is full of stuff that will never pay duty in the United States, if we fail. 'No. 1' took away, the other day, a ship-load of stuff that will never pay duty in Chili. It is a whipsaw sort of business."

"Can't you get me out of here where I will be nearer action? If Bodley should happen in now it would be all up with us, I'm afraid."

"He's coming now." They slipped through a door into a hall. "In here. This is the men's quarters. No one there now. I'll see you soon again."

O'Neill entered the conning-chamber, in which the trap was, only a second before Bodley returned to it.

"Everything all right?" asked Bodley, throwing a sharp glance at the supposed traitorous Mexican. "I thought I heard voices out here."

"Everything is all right, señor. I heard nothing."

"Well, close the trap. You may go back and watch the rear until we get ready to load the cattle."

This was just what O'Neill wanted. It would give him an opportunity to let the boys into the body of the complicated station of Astley and Bodley.



In a few minutes the boys had been conducted out of the cave, and through the inner chamber and hall to the room in which Ted was in hiding.

When they were all together again they felt much surer of success, but it would be necessary for them to move at exactly the right moment. This was to be tipped to them by O'Neill.

"I'm going on a still hunt for Stella," said Ted. "I can't stand this inaction."

After listening at the door for a moment and hearing no sound in the hall he cautiously opened the door, but closed it instantly. Some one was coming along the hall. But he left it open the merest crack, and saw a man pass and stop at a door on the opposite side and knock. It was opened slightly and a whispered conversation took place between the man in the hall and the occupant of the room.

In a few moments the door opened again, and Stella stepped into the hall, and followed the messenger.

Ted closed the door and stood with his back to it.

"Boys, she's here!" Ted's voice was vibrant with emotion. "I just saw her pass along the hall."

The boys hugged themselves and gave every noiseless demonstration of joy of which they were capable.

"Whar was she goin'?" demanded Bud, in a whisper.

"I don't know. A man called her out of the room yonder and she followed him."

"I reckon 'twould be a good scheme to keep tab on her."

"I think so, myself. I'm going right now to hunt her up. You know the signal—the Moon Valley yell." The sound of machinery was now heard, a rumble and thud. "What's up? I wish Darbey O'Neill would come back and put us next. He's the only fellow who can do it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Stella had not been outside Mabel Astley's room since she had come into the place. She was a prisoner, but Mabel treated her with every courtesy, and she was made as comfortable as the narrow quarters would permit. Her hostess was, however, remarkably reticent about everything that went on about them, and Stella had no means of knowing what was taking place outside, except by the noises that came to her ears occasionally.

She had heard the rush of the cattle over the iron floor outside, which alarmed her a good deal until the noise passed away. Mabel had gone out two or three hours before, locking the door behind her and apologizing for the act. Then she returned, dripping with water, but without explaining her whereabouts, and Stella was by this time too well trained to ask questions.

Now she had been summoned from the room, she knew not where, but Mabel had told her to go, and she had to obey.

Her messenger conducted her through the hall, and had she known that Ted and the boys were within arm's length of her she would not have been able to restrain herself, and the expedition would have been ruined right there. But happily she did not know and followed her guide through a large chamber piled with boxes and bales into another narrow hall with the same iron doors, and at the end of it the guide stopped, rapped on a door, and was bidden to enter.

The guide pushed Stella in front of him, and closed the door behind her.

She found herself in a circular room, like a tank, of

riveted steel plates, lighted by an electric bulb hanging from the ceiling.

The room was littered with plunder of all sorts and of all values. Against one wall was a pile of square wooden boxes, around the walls were casks of wines and liquors and boxes of cigars, and on a table in the center of the room were jewels in packages and scattered loosely. Seated at the side of the table was a handsome man of about forty.

He was clad all in white, and wore white shoes and a white yachting-cap.

As Stella stood within the room looking about with amazement the man was stroking his pointed brown beard and regarding her admiringly and critically.

Then Stella's eyes fell to him with an inquiring expression, and still he did not speak.

"You sent for me, sir," she said, in faltering tones.

"Yes, be seated," he replied.

Stella sat down and waited, and still the man said nothing. This made Stella mad.

"Well, sir, what is it you want with me?" she asked.

"To inform you that you are coming with me on a long voyage," he said quietly.

"You are quite mistaken," said Stella, the red of anger coming into her cheeks. "I want you to let me out of this iron prison at once."

"Oh, no, indeed, we couldn't spare you. I have observed you for some time, and I am much pleased with you. To-night we go away from here. Outside we meet my yacht, and then off to any place we desire in the world. I am not so bad-looking, and I am rich and like you. What more could you desire?"

"You are a beast," said Stella vehemently, rising from her chair. "If this is all you brought me here to say let me out."

As she rose from the chair she heard an ugly growling at one side of the room, and, looking in that direction, saw the Great Dane dog crouching on the floor, his eyes shining like rubies in the light, and showing his fangs.

"I supposed you knew that I am Captain Astley," he said, "and that I am master here, and that what I want I get."

"Except one thing," said Stella. "You don't get me."

She had made a careful survey of the room, and had observed at her feet a short stout club, which she drew nearer to her with her foot.

"You will change your mind after you have been at sea a while," he said, laughing, as he rose and approached her.

"Never," she said. "If Ted Strong was here you wouldn't dare talk like that."

"But he isn't here, and as for him, that!" he snapped his fingers derisively. "At any rate, you are going. The ship will sail soon. She is almost loaded. I did not send for you to ask you if you would go, but to tell you that you shall go. But before you start to your room to get ready you will give me a kiss to celebrate the occasion."

He approached her, laughing.

The flames of shame and anger leaped into Stella's cheeks, as she stooped swiftly and picked up the club. But Captain Astley grasped her suddenly, and her shriek of terror rang through the room and penetrated even the iron walls.

She tore herself from him, and the dog, thoroughly aroused, jumped to the length of his short chain, yelping madly.



Again Captain Astley tried to seize her, but she drew back her arm and struck him on the forehead with the club, wielded with all her strength.

As he fell, stunned by the blow, Captain Astley released the Sea-dog, which sprang at Stella's throat. Then she heard the clang of an iron door, and Ted was by her side.

The dog was upon her and she felt its hot and fetid breath in her nostrils, when a strong brown hand grasped it by the throat. Catching it by the shoulder with his other hand Ted gave its neck a twist and threw it from him.

The dog writhed a few times, then lay still. Its neck had been broken.

"Oh, Ted, you came at last. I knew you would," cried Stella, between tears and laughter.

"Yes, I heard your scream, and it has aroused the whole place," said he. "Come, we must go! There is fighting to be done."

On hearing the scream the boys had rushed from their place of concealment, and met Darbey O'Neill running through the hall.

"It has started sooner than I expected. We must hurry, or they'll get away with that boat," he said.

As they came out of the narrow hall they were met by Bodley and his satellite Rattray, called "the Rat."

Without an instant's delay O'Neill sprang upon Bodley, who was taken unprepared and went down in a heap. In the scrimmage O'Neill's beard came off, revealing his true self, and Rattray, with a look of exultant ferocity, drew a pistol and placed it at the government agent's head.

He was about to pull the trigger, when a cap struck him across the eyes, and the trigger was not pulled, while a blow from Bud's iron fist stretched him out.

Behind the men from the ship, who had followed Bodley, Ted Strong and Stella leaped from the adjoining hall.

Ted had handed Stella one of his guns, and placing himself in the doorway leading to the ship, they stood expectant.

Seeing their leaders done for, the crew turned to run to the ship, especially as Kit, Bud, and Ben had exposed their batteries of 44's, when they ran into the muzzles of Ted's and Stella's weapons.

"You might as well surrender quietly," said Ted. "If you don't, you will get shot to pieces."

Every one of them threw up his hands. They had not hired out to be killed.

Darbey O'Neill arose with Bodley handcuffed, while another pair was swiftly passed around the wrists of the dazed Rattray.

"That was soon over," said O'Neill, with a genial smile. "Here, you fellows," to the crew, "march into this room."

He indicated the quarters of the men about the place.

They marched in quietly enough, and the door was locked upon them, while Bodley and Rattray were locked in another room.

The boys then hurried to the ship and secured Macfarlane, the engineer, who was working away quietly on his engines, not having heard the commotion. That disposed of the crew.

"Where is Captain Astley's daughter?" asked Ted. "The captain is safe enough in what looks like the treasure room."

"Let us look in her room," said O'Neill.

They did so, but the room was empty.

Ted hurried to the treasure-room. Captain Astley was not there, but a door leading to a passage beyond was open, and this passage led to the chamber opening into the cave.

Captain Astley and his daughter had escaped.

An examination of the premises revealed a strangely ingenious structure built at the entrance of the cave. It was an iron and-steel house, over a portion of which was a collapsible, water-proof roof that could be raised or lowered at will by machinery invented by Macfarlane.

This roof, when raised above the surface of the water, and which in time had become coated with seaweed and barnacles, was the "vanishing island" of which the natives stood in fear, and they always crossed themselves when they passed the place where it was occasionally seen.

This very fear had served the purposes of its owners in keeping away the curious. But greed had led to their undoing.

For years they had been engaged in smuggling with little prospect of being caught at it, but they must go to stealing a widow's cattle, and fortune brought Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, there to stop it. Then the whole elaborate structure of their crimes tumbled in the space of a few minutes.

As Darbey O'Neill had predicted, the capture of Bodley and Rattray, the exposure of the smuggling, and the confiscation of the boats "No. 1" and "No. 2," as well as an enormous fortune in jewels and merchandise, made the sensation of the day.

Bodley and Rattray got long terms in the penitentiary, as did many of the crew, but Captain Astley and his daughter kept beyond the reach of the law by remaining nearly always at sea.

When, in the early morning light, the boys lowered the doors in the roof opening in the cave, and lifted the incline, they marched up it to the freedom of Santa Ysabel from cattle lifting in the future. After Stella had been restored to her aunt, and breakfast eaten, they all marched over to the big house and related all that had taken place to Señora Tarrazza. The eyes of that good woman grew large with wonder, and she crossed herself many times.

"My son," she said, laying her hand on Ted's shoulder in a motherly way, "you are, indeed, a remarkable young man. I wish, indeed, I had a son like you."

The young rough riders had accomplished their work, but they remained a month longer at Santa Ysabel to get everything running smoothly, then departed for their beloved Moon Valley, the most beautiful spot in the Black Hills.

THE END.

"King of the Wild West's Decision; or, Stella's Waif of the Plains" is the title of the next issue of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, No. 145. Ted and Stella, and their pards of the rough-riding clan, set out to defend the rights of a tot whom they have found, and whom Stella defends with all the courage of her young womanhood. By means of Stella's keen intuition and the courage and resourcefulness of Ted Strong and his friends, as vile a gang of ruffians as ever despoiled the West is thwarted and brought to justice. It is a stirring story of the mountains and plains.



## A CHAT WITH YOU.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The deluge of letters of praise pouring into our editorial rooms has impelled us to open this department, where, from week to week, we may meet our multitude of enthusiastic young readers and answer various questions concerning sports afield. If you desire to know anything connected with outdoor life, hunting, fishing, fur-collecting, or cowboy life on the plains, ask freely, since on our staff we have editors who are thoroughly posted in all that pertains to healthy sport in the open. In many cases we may have to abbreviate letters; but it shall be our aim to print everything that we believe must prove of interest to the great body of readers. We shall also, when not requested otherwise, give the address as an evidence of good faith.

**SPECIAL NOTICE**—Owing to the great number of letters still coming, and the unabated interest shown in connection with our cash prize competition, we have concluded to extend the time a month or two, so that every boy may have a chance. If you have up to now failed to enter your letter in the contest, there is still time to do so. We shall positively print the full name and address of every prize winner in this column, when the competition has closed.

Will you please tell about bears in the northern part of the American continent? Are there any in British Columbia, and, if so, what are the skins worth? I am an old reader of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*; otherwise I would not take the liberty of asking questions, and thus take up valuable space which should be devoted to the letters of regular readers.

St. Louis, Mo.

SPENCER B. RASTUM.

Yes, there are any number of bears in the wild parts of British Columbia. In many sections it is quite dangerous for a man to go at certain seasons unless he is fully armed. It was only lately that a man by the name of Horace Knight, who lives near Grand Forks, B. C., went on a hunting-trip in the mountains lying between Sutherland Creek and Christiania Lake, and found a large number of brown and cinnamon bears. He says that in a radius of fifteen miles between Sutherland Creek and Fife Station there must be at least two hundred bears. A good bearskin is worth \$50. He cleaned up about five hundred dollars from his last trip. So you see that there are bears in British Columbia, and that the hunting of these hairy creatures proves profitable to a man who knows the woods, and where to find the game.

(A letter from Ohio.)

I am a reader of your *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I praise it as being the best of all five-cent books. I like all of the boys, especially the little fat German.

R. SHERMAN HAZLETT.

"The little fat German" is a favorite with all our readers. He has so many funny things to say that it is quite impossible to read about him without shaking with laughter.

(A letter from Texas.)

I have been reading the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for a long time, and I want to say that there was never a better weekly story-paper published. I am going to read it as long as I can secure copies. I live in West Texas, and like ranch work.

G. G. RODEN.

As you live in a ranch country and know the life, you can see just how true to life are the stories of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. It is not hard for you to determine whether Ned Taylor is familiar with the happenings of the ranch, or not. We dare say that you join with us in saying that no author of boys' stories has ever equaled Ned Taylor.

I am an admirer of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. It is the best of its kind. Ted Strong is an ideal young man, fearless, and brave to a fault. He and his companions have adventures that are not impossible, like some of the stories I find in other week-

lies. On the whole, the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the best and most interesting weekly published. The other weeklies have stories that are almost impossible, and their heroes are men that have no equal in real life. I would like to be a member of the young rough riders.

PAUL McDANIEL.

Indianapolis, Ind.

Ted would be only too glad to welcome you to his band of choice spirits known as the young rough riders. Perhaps you will join him some day.

(A letter from New Brunswick.)

I have been reading the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for nearly a year, and think of Ted and his chums a whole lot. How is Beanpole's health? He is such a delicate little chap. I think Ned Taylor is quite up to date in his writing.

GORDON BLAIR.

Ned Taylor is thoroughly conversant with the subjects of which he writes. You and others who have been reading his stories for any length of time have discovered this.

(A letter from New Brunswick.)

I agree with you when you say that the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* has the best Western stories ever written.

I have been a reader of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* ever since it was first published, and think it is the best of its kind.

HAROLD LAWRENCE.

The *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* has no equal. Its stories are bright, interesting, and always hold the attention of the reader from start to finish.

(A letter from Massachusetts.)

I thank you very much for calling my attention to the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. It reminds me a great deal of *Tip Top* in a good many ways; so, after this, I think I will take the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, as well as the *Tip Top Weekly*.

HAROLD C. LINCOLN.

With these two boys' papers you will never need any more good reading-matter. You now have the best.

(A letter from Ohio.)

I have been reading the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for a long time, and I think it has the best Western stories printed.

Ted Strong has good judgment, and knows a fine horse. Ben Tremont has the strength of a giant.

CHARLES RAMSEY.

Ted's judgment is never at fault. He always knows what to do and when to do it.

I know of only one book that is better than the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and that is *Tip Top Weekly*. Still, the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is a dandy weekly. I think that the last number was fine, but I am hoping for a still better one next week.

HILARY NOEL.

The story last week was exceptionally good, and the romances are getting better each week.

(A letter from New York.)

I have read the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for over a year, and I think that it is the best of the five-cent novels. It is a larger and thicker than many other novels. Although the *Tip Top Weekly* is a good novel, I like the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* best.

HARRY UHL.

The *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* and the *Tip Top Weekly* are the best papers published for boys. Always read them, and you will never have reason to regret it.

(A letter from Kansas.)

I have been reading your *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I can safely commend it as one of the best and most interesting magazines printed to-day.

JOS. A. ILATIE.

All readers of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* speak in terms of praise when they have anything to say about it.



## ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

(A letter from New York.)

I think the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the best Western story-paper I have read in a long time. I have been reading it and *Tip Top* every week.

THOMAS A. DAIN.

This letter comes from a reader who lives in one of the picturesque towns on the Hudson River. He admires Ted Strong and the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and expects to read it and *Tip Top* for many a day to come.

(A letter from Ohio.)

For good stirring stories of the Western border, give me the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*! I have been reading this book for over a year, and think it is the finest written. Any boy who wants a good story of border life will find it in the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. Ted Strong is a "la la," and has no equal for being handy and accurate with his "shootin'-irons." I hope he will always be so, and may he live to eat the chicken that scratches on his grave! I have just finished reading the last number, and like it very much.

ALBERT J. PIRRUNG.

Write us again and have the letter a long one. Tell our readers what there is about the stories of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* that makes you like them better than other stories.

When I go into the bookstore and find that the last *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* has been sold out before I had a chance to get it, it makes me very mad. At least, it used to, but this does not happen now, as I have lately made it a point to order in advance. I did not know that this library was so popular with readers that one had to speak for a copy in advance, or wait until the news-dealer sent for some more. I have not been kept waiting any more. I wouldn't let a thing like that happen again for the world. I am so impatient to get the latest story about Ted Strong and his rough riders that I do not know what I would do if I were compelled to wait indefinitely. I am glad that I wasn't in San Francisco at the time of the fire and earthquake, as the readers had to wait several weeks before they could get their favorite weekly. They must have read and re-read their old copies. I suppose that you could not have bought a copy for love or money during those strenuous days when people could not get anything to eat, much less reading-matter.

Three cheers for the publishers of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* and its famous author, Ned Taylor.

HANS FRANKTON.

Chicago, Ill.

*ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES* were decidedly at a premium in San Francisco during the fire, and every reader of the weekly kept his copy tight in his possession, not knowing when he would get anything else to read.

I have read the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for one year, and have taken a liking to the young rough riders. I take the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* by the year now.

San Francisco, Cal.

RODMAN PELL.

When you get the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* by the year, it is sent regularly each week through the mail without any delay.

I am a reader of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and think that Ted and his rough riders are the bravest and most chivalrous boys that any one could read about.

ROY LUNQUIST.

St. Paul, Minn.

Where will we find a band of young men who would be better companions for any of us than the young rough riders?

I thought I would write and tell you what I think of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. I have read every number up to date, and I think it is one of the best weeklies in print. I hear it spoken of with enthusiasm on all sides. The *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is one of the cleanest and most interesting weeklies I have ever read. I think Ted Strong is the ideal boy, and acts in the right every time. Next to Ted Strong I like Bud Morgan the best, but I like all the boys. Ben, and Carl, and Kit are all tried, and true.

Chicago, Ill.

WILLIAM JACOBS.

You ought to write again and try for the prize the publishers are offering for the best letter written to the Chat column.

(A letter from Nova Scotia.)

I myself, as well as all the boys around here, think that the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is the best five-cent book printed. I believe that if our news-dealer had a few more copies he would sell them all. When they come in, they don't stay in the shop one minute, and the boy who is lucky enough to get his copy without waiting feels quite proud. I pay for mine ahead. I like all your libraries, but none are as good as the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. When we read of Ted and the boys, we imagine we are right there with two six-shooters. Can you in any possible way lengthen the stories? If so, we would be very much obliged to you. I could say a lot more for the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, but I have to go to school now. Could you give us a story where Ted Strong and Diamond Dick meet?

GEORGE HENSEY.

This bright, chatty letter will interest our readers very much. George likes the stories so much that he wants them made longer. Perhaps Diamond Dick and Ted will meet some time.

(A letter from Georgia.)

I have been reading the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* stories for a long time, and think it is the best weekly published for boys. Bud Morgan is a typical Western boy, while Ted Strong is just great.

With best wishes for Street & Smith, Ted Strong in particular, and all the rough riders in general, I remain one of your most faithful readers,

MARTIN THRELDKELD.

You are a faithful reader, and will remain loyal to your favorite weekly.

(A letter from Michigan.)

I have been a reader of the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and have read a great many numbers. I think they are the best books of stirring adventure out. Next to Ted, I like the Dutch youth the best. I remain an earnest reader, and give three cheers for Ted Strong.

RANDALL POLLOCK.

We all like a story that is full of adventure. This is the reason that everybody who has once read the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* continues to get the weekly.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

In reading the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, I find that it is the most interesting and best magazine published. It gives a full account of Western life.

JOHN C. MORAN.

Always read the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*. So long as you want to know all about Western life, and particularly how the cowboys spend their time on the plains and ranches, get this popular boys' publication.

I am as much pleased with the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* as I am with the *Tip Top Weekly*, and that is saying a good deal, seeing what a comparatively new weekly the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* is. Of course, I cannot draw any comparisons, as the stories are entirely of a different style, but I think, as I do of all Street & Smith's publications, that it cannot be equaled by any other publisher in the United States. The stories are written by an author who certainly knows all about the West. They are very thrillingly told. I always like to express my opinion of the stories I read.

ERNEST CHAMBERLEN.

Manchester, N. H.

Your letter shows that you read the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* with intelligence, and can appreciate its merits.

I have been reading the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY* for a long time. I have read all the other weeklies, but there is not one as good as it. The number I am reading now is the latest, and it is the best one I ever read.

Dallas, Tex.

JACK BOYD.

There is no substitute for the *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*; nothing can take its place. Our readers ask their news-dealers for a *ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY*, and, if he happens to be out of it at the time, they will not take an imitation instead, but wait until another supply of their favorite weekly comes in.



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**About the  
Early  
Numbers of**

# TIP TOP WEEKLY

**W**E receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the present writing.

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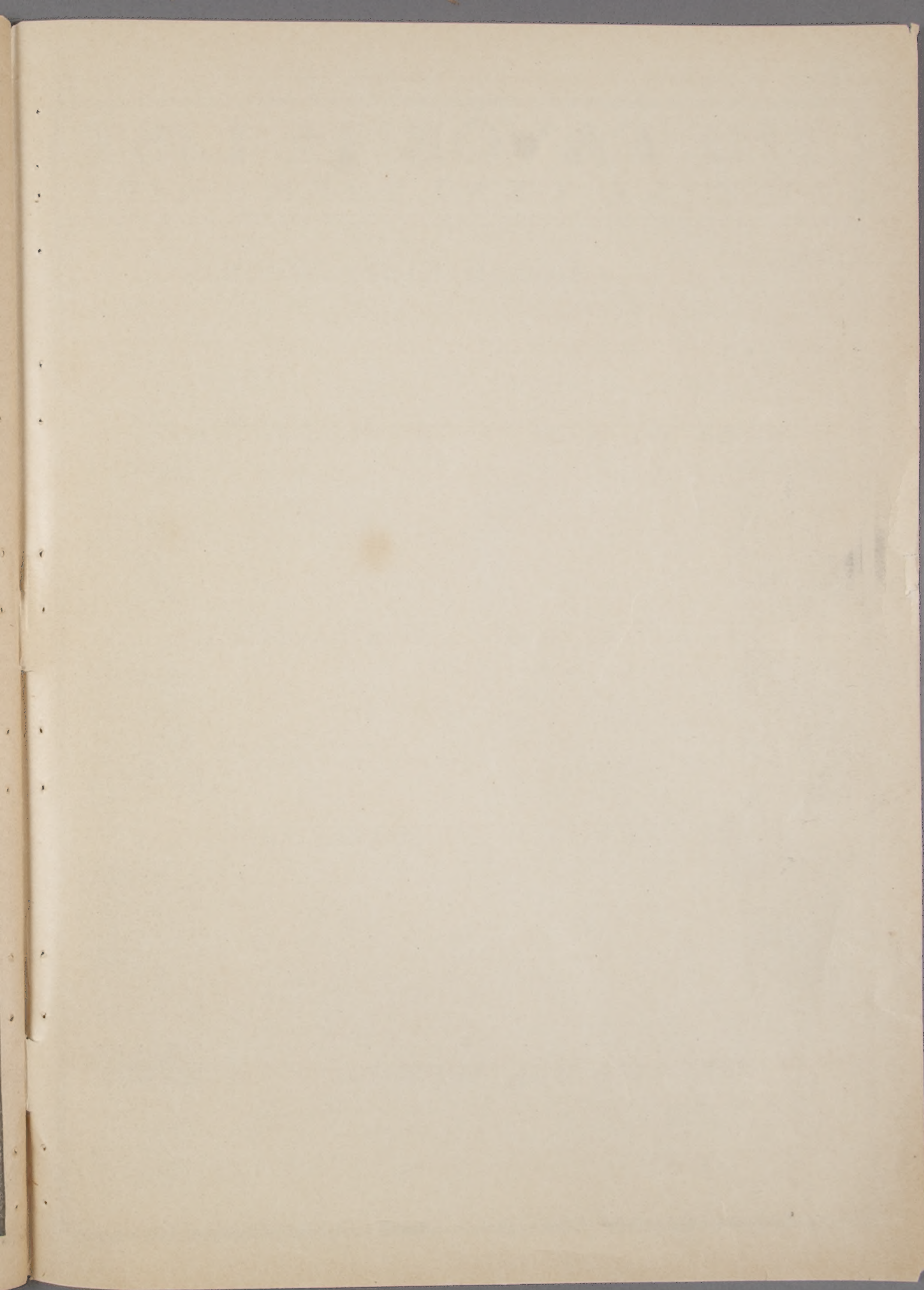
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Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

## NICK CARTER WEEKLY

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest sleuth that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful, power of fascination.



## BRAVE AND BOLD



Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

## BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor-waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.



## The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.

